OVERLORD
The lizard man Heroes
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蜥蜴人の勇者たち
丸山くがね
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4
人気あふれる戦士
イケメン
氷女
(ひとめぼれ)
美女

Overlord
(オーバーロード)
Volume 04
The Lizardman Heroes

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(丸山くがね)

Story Description:

The story begins with the last day of Yggdrasil, a popular online game which is being quietly shut down. Our protagonist Momonga decides

to stay in his beloved game until the last moment, so waits for the forced logout. Unexpectedly, the server does not shut down and Momonga is stuck in a skeleton avatar in another world. "The powerful Overlord" needs now to discover the new world and face the continuous challenges that arise.

Having no parents, friends, or place in society, this ordinary man decides to take over the new world the game has become.

Original Story can be found here:
Link

Prologue

“Welcome back, Ainz-sama.”

Returning to his own room after half a month, Albedo’s next words drained all the strength from his body.

“Would you like to have something to eat? Would you like to have a bath? Or would you like to have...me?”

For a moment, Ainz thought he could see multiple heart shapes fluttering behind Albedo’s body

“...What are you doing?”

“I’m playing newlyweds, Ainz-sama.

I heard that there is no better way of welcoming back a husband who went out on a working trip with the family pet. How was it?"

He finally understood why no one welcomed him back at the surface this time. This man who had never dated before, let alone married, was just about to calmly reply 'I don't know', but immediately swallowed those words. His pride as a man did not allow him to show weakness. Besides, how was one supposed to answer a question like 'How was it?'?

Although he had no self-confidence...why not reply with a knowledgeable attitude for a guaranteed flawless response.

“It was very charming, Albedo.”

“That’s wonderful!” Albedo’s smile showed how delighted she was.

Being assaulted by Albedo’s bewitching smile, Ainz sat down slowly and prepared to deal with business.

He felt like there was a snake slowly crawling up his back.

It was probably due to the animalistic desire flashing in Albedo’s golden eyes that he felt that way. If he were to jokingly answer ‘I want you’, she would immediately use it as a pretext to descend like a carnivorous beast onto him. Somehow, the words ‘reverse rape’ appeared in his mind.

His sexual appetite was effectively nonexistent, but the small remaining amount still made itself known at the smell emitted by Albedo. His desire to know what would happen next was spurred on by curiosity and the thought that no harm would be done.

‘Stop it, you idiot.’

It wasn’t because of strong self-control that he ignored Albedo’s feelings, it was more like resignedly telling himself that it would be impossible for a human skeleton.

Before coming to this world, he had jokingly changed Albedo’s settings to ‘be madly in love’ with him. Because of that, he felt as if he was taking advantage of her feelings

that way and thus he was unable to take even a single step forward to accept her feelings

‘But I can’t do anything about the thing I have lost... A purely platonic relationship would not progress smoothly... That’s why I am afraid of taking the next step.’

These were the thoughts of Ainz, who had never gotten into a relationship with a member of the opposite sex before.

Besides, from a certain point of view, the NPCs his comrades had created were like children. To tarnish those kind of important things would make him feel very awkward.

‘I’m so stupid. This isn’t what I should be thinking of.’

“Ah!”

Because Albedo suddenly let out her voice, the light in Ainz’s eye sockets became brighter.

“Wha-What is it!? Albedo! What happened?”

“Forgive me. A newlywed wife definitely has to be wearing the Final battle attire (naked apron) to receive the husband.”

Finishing her words, Albedo’s red face looked down at her skirt, saying:

“With your permission, I’ll change immediately.”

While stealing glances at him, she added with a bashful, yet still discernable voice: “...in front of Ainz-sama....”

“....Ah, yes.... um, seriously....haa~~~, Albedo stop joking around, and let us begin the organizational meeting and exchange information.”

“Yes, as you command.”

Ainz forced himself to place the regretful——for reasons unknown—— Albedo’s inexplicable effort at the back of his mind and slumped into his chair. He then tossed three leather bags onto the table. Toward Albedo, who’d already changed from a newlywed bride back to an outstanding secretary, he said:

“First of all, take this currency obtained in E-Rantel and use it for various experiments.”

The three bags all had different sizes, with the largest one bulging enough to be able to stand. Inside of them were the gold, silver and copper coins Ainz had earned as an adventurer.

“As you command, this money will be used for Nazarick’s defense systems, as well as experiments on the summoning systems for minions.”

“See to it. Furthermore, confirm at once whether or not these can be used for the manufacturing of magic scrolls and other items.”

The gold obtained in the game YGGDRASIL wasn't just used to buy items, it was also used for many other things: to cover the administration fees for a guild's base's defense systems and the costs for automatically summoning servants of Lv. 30 or higher, as a medium to activate certain spells, to pay the manufacturing costs of items and even as a price for the revival of dead NPCs.

It had already been confirmed that there were no problems using YGGDRASIL's gold coins in this world. However, they still needed to find out if this world's currency could also be used to cover their expenses, especially if it was possible to use silver and copper coins——since gold coins were the

only currency in YGGDRASIL.

It wouldn't be the slightest exaggeration to say that these experiments could affect Nazarick's fate. If the currency obtained in this world could be used in the same way as in YGGDRASIL, then future operation policies would be affected, notably regarding the importance attributed to coins.

Depending on the situation, the priority given to obtaining coins would increase. On the other hand, if the currency of this world couldn't be used, then the money in the Treasury would become the final lifeline and any pointless spending would have to be curbed.

"Now about Clementine——"

Saying the name of the woman's missing corpse, Ainz made a face as if he'd bit into a bug.

Because of Ainz's mistake, this woman who learned much precious information had probably been revived. The disquieting sensation that she was probably disseminating her information was slowly accumulating.

The number of possible enemies were many, yet information regarding them was scarce. In contrast, the information on this side had already been leaked.

'It would be best if the targets receiving the information were original guild members, but...being that lucky would simply be wishful

thinking. Our future actions should be taken with more caution. Still, what should be done about the identity of Momon?'

Momon would probably be suspect, but it would be a waste to immediately abandon an identity in the middle of elevating its fame. The fact that Ainz and Momon were the same person should not have been leaked yet.

'There's no choice but to adapt to future developments.'

Unable to think of an answer, Ainz put the subject to the side to avoid pondering on futile questions.

"Order Pandora's Actor to throw one of that woman's swords into

the Treasury's Shredder to see what happens."

"Shredder?"

Albedo's question reminded Ainz of the machine's real name.

"Exchange Box. It allows people with Merchant abilities to appraise items of higher value. Order Pandora's Actor to make use of Nearani-san's appearance to use his special ability."

While looking at Albedo, who signaled her understanding by lowering her head, Ainz put the parchment on the table.

"There is another thing. This is the world map obtained from E-Rantel."

“Is this....it?”

Albedos softly pursed her eyebrows, the reason was simple. This map was way too roughly made.

“I understand your dissatisfaction. This is only a map of the surroundings, it shows only a portion of this world. Moreover, the measures are inconsistent and many landmarks are left unmarked.”

There were many examples of information that Ainz had obtained from the Guild Master of the Magician’s Guild in E-Rantel that were not shown on the map, such as the locations of the Centaur tribes in the grassland, the Scorpionmen’s nest in the desert,

the Dwarven country's mountains, etc.. In all, this map was only useful for humans.

The reliability of a dubious map was low, but better maps would cost more money and time to map; and there were no better ones available.

These were the words of theh Magician's Guild's Master, Theo Rakesheer, who was very close to Ainz, so it should be the truth.

Obtaining a map of such a degree was already an unreasonable request, as could be seen from his attitude.

"I understand. Then I shall have copies made and distributed to each Floor Guardian."

“Very good, before that let me explain.”

Ainz pointed to the middle area where minute details were inscribed around the area.

“This is E-Rantel, and here is the Great Tomb of Nazarick.”

The finger moved from the middle toward the northeast, near the enormous forest that were the surroundings of Nazarick. This could be ascertained from the terrain.

“Here is the Azellerisia Mountain Range, the border between the Kingdom of Re-Estize and the Baharuth Empire. Starting from the southern tip and revolving around

the mountain range, this large area is Tove Forest. And between the southern tip of the mountain range and Tove Forest is a river that flows into a ladle-shaped lake." Ainz pointed to the southern side of the lake.

"These are the Great Wetlands, the location of the Lizardmen's village."

Confirming Albedo's nod, Ainz continued to explain.

"The following is from the Magican's Guild Master's explanation about the surrounding countries. To the Kingdom's northwest is an area with a great number of mountain ranges where many races of demi-humans have formed the Confederation of

Yagrande. Caution should be taken toward the Five-, or maybe, Seven-headed Dragon acting as one of the representatives. And to the Kingdom's southwest is a country known as the Holy Kingdom. It's marked haphazardly on the map, but the country's border is protected by a wall, the 10,000 Mile Great Wall. It guards against the Wilderness, where many demi-humans are in constant dispute."

"That's where Demiurge was sent before."

"That's right. On the other side of the Wilderness is the Slane Theocracy, a possible enemy we must caution against."

"Is this line the border?"

Albedo used her marble-white hand to point at an encircling line.

“Most likely. Truthfully speaking, this border doesn’t say much. It’s very rough. Look here, to the northeast of the Empire lies a number of countries. Together they form the Alliance of Nations, they also seem to include demi-human cities. The southwest of the Empire has many canyons forming a giant array of Stela. Countless caves house a group of humans who raise Wyverns. Their tribes live right here.”

Summarizing Ainz’s swords, this area seemed to be similar to Wulingyuan1, but the actual situation wasn’t very clear.

“Wyvern riders?”

In YGGDRASIL, flying dragons could be summoned by those with the Cavalry job that had reached the late Lv. 30s, and there was no similar evidence in this world of riding monsters.

“It’s like this...ordinarily they can be said to be extremely powerful. Nonetheless, for the Great Tomb of Nazarick, they are not so useful for invading...and then below this, to the east of this giant lake——we reach the edge of the map.”

Ainz pointed at the table surface beyond the map.

“There seems to be a country here that is called the Dragon King

Country.”

“Dragon?”

“Correct. It is a country that was created by a powerful dragon in the past. This country’s royalty has also inherited dragon blood...whether it is true or not is doubtful...well, that’s the extent of the map’s explanation.”

If it were the world where Ainz went by the name of Satoru Suzuki, this layer of gold plating would probably be a sham. However in this world, the possibility of it being true was much higher.

“Then Ainz-sama, the countries we ought to be alert against are the Slane Theocracy, and the

Confederation of Yagrande?”

Ainz folded his arms and let out a ‘Un’2 noise.

To the degree of talking about countries, and because there currently was no view that could be made due to the lack of intelligence, toward this response Albedo slowly lowered her head.

“Very sorry, this country right now also needs to be an alert factor.”

“...Correct. Even if there aren’t any concerns about this country, it is also possible for an alarmingly powerful individual to exist.”

The person who used a World-class item on Shalltear, and the like.

Even if these thoughts were unspoken, it seemed to have been transferred to Albedo.

Ainz then respectively pointed at the areas south and east beyond the map.

“Towards the east there is a city called the Sea City, towards the south there is another city created by the one called the King of the Eight Desires, it’s the city you must be most wary of. The King of the Eight Desires’s City...is a floating city in the desert.”

“Floating city?”

“This is merely hearsay, and may not be accurate, but there is a metropolis below the floating city.

As if the floating city can generate an unlimited amount of water, the metropolis is entirely surrounded by a magic enchantment, such that people cannot imagine it is in a desert."

Albedo's eyes turned frosty, and several words were whispered.

"Would you like to have servants carry out some forced reconnaissance?"

"There is no need to take such a risk. Even if the World-class item users arrived here, before understanding their combat prowess, it is also necessary to confront them with a smile...how is Shalltear's condition?"

“Regarding the resurrection, physically there is no problem, except…”

“Your speech is hesitant. Is it something that will make me upset?”

“Ah! Extremely sorry for this. Actually, mentally she is a little disturbed.”

“…Did the effects of the mind control still remain? Even with the resurrection after death is it unable to dispel the effect of the World-class item?”

“No, nothing like that…because of showing hostility and battling with Ainz-sama, deep down she considered this to be an

unforgivable sin.”

Ainz was momentarily confused.

That was entirely Ainz’s smistake, Shalltear committed no wrong. She was already told this several times.

“Please forgive my rudeness of objecting to Ainz-sama’s decision.”

Ainz nodded toward Albedo who had a sincere expression.

“I think it’s best if there is some punishment.”

The fire in Ainz’s eye sockets darkened, he opened his mouth, but closed it immediately because the person in front of him still had words to say.

“……‘The carrot and the stick’ is a well known idiom. If Ainz-sama were to mete out punishment, then the guilt in Shalltear’s heart will disappear, on the other hand, without punishment the negative feelings in her heart won’t go away.”

So it was, it was true that there couldn’t be reward without punishment, the two had to both exist to hold reason.

Regarding the parts though, to what degree to punish and to what degree to forgive, these were all decided by Ainz. If it was the usual, everything would simply be forgiven by Ainz.

On the other hand, even though it’d

be slightly hard on Shalltear, but this was a good educational opportunity.

“.....I get it, let’s give Shalltear some punishment.”

“That’s right, this way will be best, also please forgive my impudence.”

“What are you saying. To propose your viewpoint like earlier is what I need. When I am out of ideas, proposing ideas like you did just now is exactly what you should do as your duty as the Great Tomb of Nazarick’s Floor Guardian Overseer.”

“Thank you very much!”

With red cheeks and wet eyes, the world-class beauty lowered her

head toward Ainz. Getting embarrassed over her heartfelt words, Ainz waved as a reply.

“Therefore, I shall go do some work. The matters here will rely on you.”

“Yes! Leave it to me! In Ainz-sama’s absence, I will take responsibility and manage properly.”

On the way, Ainz heard a little bit of a wifely tone mixed up in there but he ignored it, because Albedo’s words were not finished.

“However, Ainz-sama must take care, the World-class item user who brainwashed Shalltear might attack here.”

“Well!”

Returning to this room, Ainz let out a displeased sound for the first time.

“If they were to come, easily repelling them…cannot be done. Rest assured, Albedo. If we encounter an unknown assailant, I will treat retreating as a priority, and even have servants prepared to serve as shields.”

Ainz slowly looked toward the ceiling, imagining the presence of alarms which should have been there.

The hostile World-class item user, players that may or may not exist, and vestiges of players that existed in the past of course would not necessarily appear as enemies.

However, matters concerning safety should not be handled carelessly, therefore preparations ought to be made with regards to the worst-case scenario.

“The first consideration is that before the enemy’s true identity is confirmed, operations must be as covert as possible. However, it is also necessary to place some bait to lure the prey...how should such a scheme be carried out?”

Albedo slightly lowered her eyesight, but from this reaction Ainz already anticipated the result.

“The report from the Sighing River has not yet been received. Entoma’s report was within the expected range, and the battle began pretty

much closer to the destination, so the report was prepared in advance."

"So it's like this...although it is not the desired outcome, it may be possible to reap some accomplishments there."

"Being able to say that puts me at ease."

"Good. Although I wish to head over there to witness it personally, regrettably my adventurer work has piled up and I am unable to go. However, I still wish to know of the status of the battle, therefore video record the battle between the Lizardmen and the army of the Great Tomb of Nazarick."

Chapter 1: Departure

Part 1

Azellerisia Mountains—the

mountain range separating the Baharuth Empire and the Kingdom of Re-Estize, which also served as the national border. The Great Forest of Tove covered the mountain range's southern foothills and to the north of the forest lay an enormous lake.

This enormous lake had a radius of approximately 20 kilometers, and was shaped like an inverted calabash, divided into the upper lake and the lower lake. The upper lake was relatively deep, hence large creatures gathered there while the lower lake was inhabited by smaller creatures.

At the southern end of the lower lake was a large region where the lake and the wetlands blended into

each other. Multiple structures had been built there, with a dozen wooden stilts serving as a foundation for each one. A door opened at the side of one of these houses, and its owner entered the sunlight.

His demi-human race was known as Lizardman.

Lizardmen were beings which shared human and reptilian characteristics. More specifically, aside from their heads which did not have basic human features, they were bipedal lizards, with dexterous hands and feet.

They were regarded as demi-humans along with goblins and orcs, and were not as civilized as

humans, with a lifestyle considered barbaric to others. However, it also could not be denied that they had a culture of their own.

Adult male Lizardmen had an average height of about 190 cm and were proud of their strong muscles, weighing over 100 kg with little body fat

A reptilian tail used for maintaining balance grew from their waists.

Evolution caused them to have webbed feet for ease of movement on the wetlands. It was also because of this that land activities were slightly inconvenient, but this posed no problem for their general lifestyle.

Their dark green and charcoal grey scales were similar to those of a crocodile instead of a lizard's, and they were harder than the low-end defensive equipment used by humans.

Their hands had five fingers just like humans, but with short claws growing at their tips.

The weapons wielded by both hands were basically very primitive items. Since it was impossible for them to discover ore in the wetlands, their weapons were mainly spears crafted from magical beasts' claws, or akin to blunt weapons with stone bound to them.

The sky was a clear blue, the sun had already risen above, and a small

amount of thin white clouds were in a combed pattern in the sky. It was good weather, with the distant mountain range clearly visible.

The Lizardmen's field of vision was wide, and the sun's blinding glare could be seen even without moving the head. He, Zaryusu Shasha, squinted and walked down the stairs rhythmically, while scratching the imprint of a black scale on his chest.

Lizardmen had a strict class society, with the tribal chief as the leader of the tribe. This position was not determined by blood, but elected by the tribe for being the strongest individual. This election for tribal chief took place once every year.

Assisting the chief was the council of elders made up of elected elderly Lizardmen. Below them were the warrior class, followed by general male Lizardmen, general female Lizardmen, and then Lizardmen youths. Their society was structured this way.

Of course, there also existed those who did not belong to any of these categories.

First were the druids, who were led by the Elder Druid. They aided tribal life through the use of magical cures and weather forecasts to predict dangers.

Next were the hunters, whose ranks consisted of rangers, responsible for fishing and hunting, but since

ordinary Lizardmen would also assist in this aspect, their most important job were forest activities.

Lizardmen were omnivores, but their staple food was a species of fish around 80 cm long, and they did not consume many plants or fruits.

Despite this, hunters entered the forest mainly to harvest timber. For Lizardmen, land was not safe, and even simply collecting wood from the forest required skilled personnel.

As such, they were allowed to make their own decisions, but still fell within the jurisdiction of the chief and had to obey the chief's commands. Lizardmen therefore

had an explicitly paternalistic society with division of labor done according to jobs. However, there were also those outside the jurisdiction of the tribal chief.

Those were travelers.

Hearing about travelers would evoke the impression of foreigners, but this was impossible in Lizardmen society. Lizardmen had a closed society, and a situation where an outsider was accepted into the tribe was exceedingly rare

So, who were these travelers?

They were Lizardmen who wished to see the outside world.

Basically, unless something drastic like a shortage of food occurred,

Lizardmen would not leave their hometown. However, there was a small chance that a Lizardman who wanted to see the outside world would appear.

When travelers decided to leave the tribe, they would have a special insignia engraved on their chests. This was proof that they had left the jurisdiction of the tribe's control upon leaving the tribe.

Most of those who left the tribe never came back, died during their travels, found a new place to call home, or encountered a different fate...but on rare occasions, they would return to their hometown after having seen the world.

Travelers that returned were

evaluated highly because of the level of knowledge they had gathered. Although they were individuals detached from the power hierarchy, they were still prominent within the tribe.

There were some who kept their distance from Zaryusu out of respect, but his fame was greater than that. It was not only because he was a traveler. The reason was...

When descending from the lowest stair to the wetlands' surface, his favorite weapon holstered on his waist collided with his scales, creating a clicking sound.

It was a blue and white blade with a dim glow. The shape was a bit peculiar, the blade and the handle

were integrated, resembling a three-pronged fork. Starting from the grip part of the body it became increasingly thinner, until becoming paper-thin at the tip of the blade.

There were no Lizardmen who did not know of this weapon. All the surrounding Lizardmen tribes referred to it as one of the four treasured magic items: Frost Pain.

This was the reason behind Zaryusu's great fame.

Zaryusu started to move.

He had two different destinations. The gift which he intended to bring to one of those destinations was currently carried on his back.

It was one of the large fish which served as the staple food of Lizardmen. Walking as he carried four of these fish on his back, the stench which entered his nose did not cause any discomfort to Zaryusu. On the contrary, it was a smell which made him feel very hungry.

A strong desire to eat. After puffing out wind several times from his nose, he expelled this desire. Like this, Zaryusu pattered as he walked without stopping through the Green Claw Tribe's village.

Children, who still had their bright green scales, ran around and let out 'sha sha' sounding laughter, but stopped as they noticed the objects on Zaryusu's back. Healthy,

growing children peered toward Zaryusu from under the shadows of houses——no, it was because of the fish that they gathered together. Their mouths were slightly parted, even drooling. They stayed a slight distance away, but their eyesight was still locked on, with gazes like children who craved snacks.

Zaryusu smiled wryly and pretended to not notice as he continued walking. He had already decided who to give them to. It was regretful, but they weren't meant for the children.

The children's gazes were not caused by hunger—something that would've been impossible a few years ago. This gave Zaryusu a feeling of happiness.

With his back facing the reluctant gazes, he passed through the residential area and arrived at the hut that was his destination.

This area was not connected to the village. Going a bit further it became dissimilar to the wetlands which were the general depth of the lake. This hut, which was sturdier than it looked, was built on this subtle border and was larger in size than Zaryusu's home.

The strangest feature was that it was tilted. Because of this reason, approximately half of the house was submerged in the water. It was not collapsed due to damage, but was intentionally constructed to be so.

Swishing, Zaryusu got closer to the house while making audible water noises.

Wheedling sounds could be heard from the hut, it could probably smell the scent of fishes.

With a squeak, the head of a snake with deep brown scales and amber eye-pupils appeared from the window. After confirming that it was Zaryusu, the neck extended and coquettishly twisted around him.

“Good, good.”

With a habitual hand movement, Zaryusu stroked the snake’s body. The snake comfortably squinted using the eye protection membrane. Zaryusu also thought that the scaly

snakeskin felt fine.

This creature was Zaryusu's pet, called Rororo.

Since Rororo was raised from young, it was as if it could actually understand language.

"Rororo, I've bought food. Be good and eat it okay?"

Zaryusu chucked the brought fish through the window. Dang and Pluck sounds came from the inside.

"I really want to stay and play, but right now I really need to attend to the fish. See you in a bit."

It probably understood the contents of the speech, and let out a reluctant noise and slowly released

Zaryusu before returning inside the house. Afterward, a chewing sound could be heard from inside.

Having confirmed that Rororo was in good health, judging by the spirited manner of eating, Zaryusu left the hut.

Zaryusu's destination after departing the hut was the lake, which was a fair distance away from the village.

Zaryusu silently pattered along the forest. Swimming in the water should be much faster, but his concerns of 'whether any problems would occur on land' had fostered his habit of monitoring the land path. It was just that the trees would obstruct his line of sight

while walking, therefore to Zaryusu it could also be considered a matter which consumed his concentration quite a bit.

Finally, he could see his destination from a gap in the trees. Zaryusu let out a sigh of relief since no obstacles had arisen along the way. With only a short distance left to travel through the forest, Zaryusu quickened his pace.

Brushing aside tree branches like a diver swimming in the water, Zaryusu widened his eyes in surprise. This was because he saw the figure of a person's back he did not expect to encounter.

That person was similar to Zaryusu: a Lizardman with black scales.

“Elder Brother...”

“...Oh, it’s you.”

The Lizardman with black scales turned his head around and looked in welcome at Zaryusu. This Lizardman was the current tribal chief of the ‘Green Claw’ Tribe; Zaryusu’s elder brother Shasuryu.

He won the competition to be the chief twice in a row, and retained his position without needing to fight this year. His body was amazingly huge. When he stood next to Zaryusu, who was of an average build, he made him look small in comparison.

There was a single long, white and old scar on his black scales. It

looked like lightning piercing through dark clouds.

This fellow who carried an enormous sword on his back, was close to two meters in height and was huge and plain. The steel sword ——proof of being tribal chief——had magic which increased its sharpness and prevented it from rusting.

Zaryusu and his older brother stood next to each other on the lakeside.

“What are you doing here?”

“...Elder Brother, that should not be your line, but mine. This is not the kind of place the tribal chief would need to visit personally.”

“Muu—”

Lost for words, Shasuryu muttered his catch phrase, then turned to look at the lake in front of them.

Sticks stretched out from inside the lake, surrounding the area. Being carefully placed, there were very fine mesh nets between the sticks. Their purpose was obvious with a single glance.

It was a fish farm.

“Could it be...stealing a meal?”

Hearing Zaryusu’s words, Shasuryu’s tail jumped and flapped against the ground with a flopping sound.

“Muu, there is no way that could happen. I am only here to check up on the breeding conditions.”

“…”

“Younger Brother, do you see your older brother in that kind of light?!”

Finishing his statement with a strong intonation, Shasuryu slid one foot forward. The pressure he gave off felt like a wall pressing down on Zaryusu. Even Zaryusu, who was an experienced traveler and veteran of many battles, felt the urge to take a couple of steps backwards.

However, he had the perfect retort.

“If it’s only to inspect the breeding conditions, then it also means that you don’t want them. Such a shame, Elder Brother. If they were raised well, I was thinking about giving some of them to you.”

“Muu—”

The flopping sound stopped, and the tail appeared dejected.

“So very aromatic too. They have become nicely fattened because of the nutrients diligently fed to them, even more plump than hunted fish.”

“Oh—”

“If you keep them in your mouth, some really good-tasting juice will flow out. Biting down with a crunch will also make it seemingly melt in your mouth.”

“Muuu—”

Once again the cocked tail gave off a flopping sound, it was even more

intense than before.

Half of Zaryusu's attention was transfixed on that tail, the other half was directed to addressing his elder brother in an almost teasing manner.

"Sister-in-law has also mentioned this before. Elder Brother's tail is just too honest."

"What? That horrible person, making fun of her husband. Say it again, which part is honest?"

At the sight of his elder brother replying while looking over his shoulder at the tail which was still, Zaryusu was momentarily lost and didn't know how to react, before vaguely replying 'right'.

“Huh. That horrible person... If you have a woman...then you will understand how I feel right now.”

“I won’t be able to marry.”

“Huh, nonsense. Is it because of that mark? You’re better off ignoring whatever those elders say. Saying that there are no women in this village who find your affection annoying...even the person with the most beautiful tail will accept you.”

Lizardmen stored nutrients in their tails, therefore having a thicker tail was an important key factor for the opposite sex. In the past, Zaryusu would have chosen a thick-tailed female. However, the grown-up Zaryusu, who now had an understanding of the world,

wouldn't choose in such a way.

"Taking the current situation of the village into account, I have no desire for females with thicker tails. If I had to use tails as the criteria, I would choose a female with a slim tail instead. Personally, I think one like Sister-in-law's is also fine."

"Of course it is fine for someone with your personality...except, don't you dare mess around. I do not want to butcher anyone over some silly matters. Speaking of which, you also ought to realize the pain of being married. It's just not fair that I am the only one."

"Hey, hey, Elder brother... I'll tell Sister-in-law."

“Ugh...this is one of the pains of being married. Even me, your elder brother and tribal chief, can be threatened.”

Boisterous laughter sounded out by the peaceful lakeside.

After the laughter stopped, Shasuryu looked at the fish lake as he voiced out some words of frustration.

“But honestly? It’s just too great. Your...”

Zaryusu came to the rescue of his elder brother who fell silent.

“Do you mean the breeding farm?”

“Right, right, that’s the one. In our tribe’s past we have never had an

individual who would do such a thing. Furthermore, many people already know of its success. In the future, more and more people will feel envy at the sight of your fish and copy your ways."

"It's all thanks to Elder Brother. I know Elder Brother has said all kinds of things about me to everybody."

"Younger Brother, talking to many people about reality does not count for much. That kind of stuff is merely recounting anecdotes. If it weren't for your hard work in nurturing such delicious fish from this breeding farm, those words would have been meaningless."

The initial breeding farms were

constantly failing. This was expected, since they were built solely based on the impressions from talks during his travels. Just the construction of the fence was met with constant setbacks. After a year of trial and error, although the fish lake was created, there was still more work to be done.

Fish could not be left alone without being looked after. It was necessary to obtain fish feed.

The fish in the fish lake had died out many times by experimenting with a wide variety of food for the sake of finding out what kind of feed was best. There were also instances of the surrounding nets being broken by monsters, freeing all of the fish.

There were some who criticized him behind his back for ‘treating fish captured for food as toys’. There were also those who said that he was nothing but a fool. However, the results of his efforts finally bore fruit.

The shadows of enormous, swimming fish were reflected on the lake’s surface. Comparing its size to hunted fish, it would be in the very large category, and no Lizardmen would believe that these were fish that had been completely reared from birth, apart from Zaryusu’s elder brother and sister-in-law.

“...Simply amazing, Younger Brother.”

Seeing the same sight, Zaryusu's elder brother said this in a low voice at the same time. His words were filled with emotion.

"This is also thanks to Elder Brother."

The younger brother who replied also conveyed such emotions in his tone.

"Huh, what have I done?"

'Truthfully, Elder Brother'—
Shasuryu did not do anything. However, that was just the official stance.

During times when the fish's health deteriorated, priests would suddenly show up here. When collecting materials to build a fence, there

would be many individuals who came to help. When captured fish were separated and allocated, there would be live fish. In addition, there were also fruits brought back by the hunters to be used as fish feed.

Those fellows who came over to assist all refused to reveal who they were doing this favor for. However, even the dumbest person would realize who was pulling the strings, even if the person was adamant on not disclosing the name.

Because it was not appropriate for the tribal chief to look after travelers, who had seceded from the tribe hierarchy.

“Elder Brother, wait for them to grow a little more larger, then I

shall take some to your place first."

"Hum. Then I'll look forward to it."

Turning around, Shasuryu took a step away from the place, then said in a low voice.

"I'm sorry."

"...What are you saying, Elder Brother. Elder Brother has not committed any wrong."

These words may or may not have been heard. Zaryusu merely looked silently at the figure of Shasuryu's back moving away from the lake shore.

Having confirmed the condition of the fish lake and returning to the village, Zaryusu suddenly felt a

strange feeling, and looked toward the sky, yet there was nothing out of the ordinary up there. The whole sky was blue, with a thin layer of clouds at the mountains toward the north.

It was the usual landscape.

There were no changes. Just at the moment he brushed it off as a misconception, a weird layer of clouds appeared in the middle of the sky.

Almost at the same time, black clouds which blocked out the sunlight suddenly appeared at the center of the village. Those were thick rainclouds which cast a shadow over the entire village.

Everyone was surprised and looked up into the sky.

The druids had said there would be clear skies for the entire day. Priests made their weather forecasts using both magic and their many years of knowledge accumulated through experience, therefore the accuracy of their predictions was extremely high. As such, anything that was not predicted would come as a surprise to anyone.

However, the strangest feature was that there were no rainclouds apart from the dark clouds covering the village. Simply put, it was as if someone had called out the clouds and placed them above the village.

Furthermore another strange

feature appeared.

While the clouds swirled with the village as the epicenter, they also expanded in range at a constant rate. It was as if the sandwiched sky was being invaded by the terrible momentum of the ominous dark clouds.

Warriors all around scrambled to be on alert. Children escaped by rushing back into their homes. Zaryusu bent down, observing the surrounding while reaching towards Frost Pain.

The dark clouds completely covered the sky, the blue sky could still be seen in the far distance. It was as if the dark clouds were targeting this village.

From there, a clamor arose in the village center. The wind carried over a high-pitched sound produced by Lizardmen's vocal chords.

That sound was an alarm, one which signaled that there were formidable enemies and advised others to evacuate according to the situation.

Zaryusu who heard this sound bolted along the wetlands at a speed which was fast for Lizardmen.

'Run. Run. Keep on running.'

Moving in the wetlands was extremely difficult, requiring use of the tail to act as a counterbalance. At a speed unattainable by humans

——although Lizardmen feet were more suited for this environment—— Zaryusu reached the source of the alarm.

At that place, Shasuryu and the tribe's warriors had formed a circular formation, staring at the village center.

Following the object in their line of sight, Zaryusu also glared at the same place.

Everyone's eyes were focused on a monster which looked as if it were created from dark mist.

Within the dark mist, numerous terrified faces would appear then quickly vanish. Although faces of various races appeared, the one

thing they had in common were expressions of agony.

Carried by the wind were sounds of sobbing, resentment, painful lament and dying gasps melding together to form a chorus.

With his back frozen from the gathered resentment, Zaryusu trembled in fear.

'...Not good...we should have let all the people in the vicinity escape, leaving Elder Brother and I to deal with this, but if that were the case...'

The surrounding Lizardmen were all elite warriors of the tribe, but the opponent was one which even Zaryusu was terrified of: a powerful undead. In this situation, the only

two who were able to give a proper fight would be Zaryusu and his elder brother. Even more importantly, Zaryusu knew that this undead had special abilities.

Diverting his attention slightly, he noticed that the majority of the Lizardmen present were all taking short and sharp breaths, as if they were scared like little children— despite all of them being of the warrior class

The monster stood at the village center and made no movement.

After some time had passed, while maintaining a tense atmosphere and aware that only a tiny disturbance would trigger the escalation of a fierce battle, the

warriors slowly narrowed the distance. They resisted the mental stress and moved into action.

Using his peripheral vision to confirm that Shasuryu had drawn his weapon, Zaryusu also swiftly and silently took up his sword. If it became a fight, he intended to launch a surprise attack faster than anyone else.

'It is necessary to tell others about that guy's special ability, therefore, I cannot act rashly.'

The tension in the atmosphere thickened. Suddenly, the sounds of resentment stopped.

The noises emitted from the monster mixed together, forming

one sound different to the intelligible cursing earlier. It had a definite meaning now:

“Listen well. I serve as the messenger of the Supreme Ruler and I came here to announce his decree..”

Everyone looked at each other. Only Zaryusu and Shasuryu did not break eyesight.

“Proclaiming your death sentence, the Great One has sent his army to exterminate you. In his leniency, he has granted you mortals time to put up a meaningless resistance. Eight days from now, the Lizardmen tribe of this lake shall become the second sacrifice.”

Zaryusu and grimaced, revealing sharp teeth and issued an intimidating sound.

“Resist stubbornly, mortals. Allow the Great One to relish in your demise.”

Like smoke which constantly changed shape, the monster also gradually deformed and floated into the sky.

“Do not forget. Eight days.”

As if there were no obstruction, it flew in the sky toward the forest, with its departing back figure watched by many Lizardmen. Zaryusu and Shasuryu were silently looking at the distant sky.

Part 2

The biggest hut in the village—the assembly hall—was rarely ever used. Clan leaders had absolute authority on all matters and assembly only happened once in a blue moon. There was no real value in having the hut, but on this day the inside of the hut was filled with strained clamor.

Many Lizardmen had gathered, causing the spacious hut to feel narrow and stifling: the warriors, the druids, the hunters, the elder council and Zaryusu, who was a traveler. Everyone sat cross-legged, facing Shasuryu.

Acting in his capacity as clan chief, he declared the start of the meeting

and the first to speak was the Elder Druid.

The aged Lizardman's body was covered in white dye, showing fantastical drawings. Although the symbols had many meanings, their significance was unknown to Zaryusu.

"You all remember the black cloud that covered the sky? That was magic. From what I know, there are two spells to manipulate weather. One is called 「Control Weather」, a 6th tier magic. We can safely rule that out since magic of that level is in the realm of legends. The other is a 4th tier magic called 「Control Cloud」. This is also a spell that only a powerful magic caster can cast. We would be fools to stand

against such a foe."

Behind the Elder Druid, the similarly garbed druids nodded their heads in agreement.

Although Zaryusu understood how powerful 4th tier magic was, the other Lizardmen did not and their voices of doubt filled the surroundings.

Not sure of how to explain, the Elder Druid showed a perplexed expression before pointing at a Lizardman. The one being pointed at showed a confused expression, pointing at himself as well.

"Yes, you. Can you defeat me?"

The Lizardman slowly shook his head.

He might stand a chance if both sides were using weapons, but if you included magic, the odds of winning were really low. Or rather, it was nearly impossible for a mere warrior to win.

“However, even I can only use 2nd tier spells.”

“So to say, he should be twice as strong as you?”

Facing this kind of dumb question, the Elder Druid sighed and shook his head.

“It’s not that simple. Faced with magic of the 4th tier, even our Clan Chief would be easily killed.”

“Although it’s not absolute,” added the Elder Druid speculatively, then

closed her mouth.

Finally understanding the terror of 4th tier magic, the room became silent. At this moment, Shasuryu started talking.

“In the end, what the Elder Druid means to say is…”

“Fleeing would be the best course of action. Even if we fought, there would be no way to win.”

“What are you saying!”

Following the thick and low roar, a tall Lizardman stood up. He had a similar build as Shasuryu and was the Head Warrior.

“To flee without even putting up a fight! Running away when facing

just that level of danger is intolerable!”

“—What is in your head!? It would be too late if we were to start fighting!”

The Elder Druid glared and stood abruptly, face-to-face with the Head Warrior. Both of them had already lost their tempers and made threatening sounds. Just when everyone feared the situation was about to escalate, a cold voice could be heard.

“...That’s enough.”

With faces like being woken with cold water, the two of them turned to Shasuryu and seated themselves as if in apology.

“Head Hunter, let us hear your point of view.”

“……Elder Druid and Head Warrior’s opinions are both understandable, they both make sense.”

To answer Shasuryu’s question the skinny Lizardman opened his mouth. Although he seemed small in size, it was not for a lack of muscle, but rather that his muscles were densely packed.

“That is why since there is still time, we should examine the situation. Supposedly, they are sending an army. There ought to be signs of construction for a forward base and such, therefore we should observe first and decide afterward.”

Without any information, saying this or that would be completely useless. A number of people expressed their agreement.

“—Elder.”

“There’s not much to say, all of the opinions are correct. All that’s left is to leave the decision up to the Clan Chief.”

“Muu...”

Letting his gaze wander, Shasuryu met Zaryusu’s eyes, who was sitting among the crowd, and gave him a nod.. Zaryusu felt as if he’d gotten a gentle push on the back—whether the road ahead was dangerous was unknown—still, he raised his hand to show he had an idea.

“Clan Chief, please allow me to speak.”

At this time, the focus of all the Lizardmen gathered on Zaryusu. Most of them wore expectant expressions, but others showed discontent.

“This isn’t the place for a ‘Traveler’ to be speaking. You should be grateful we’re already allowing you to attend,” a member of the Elder Council declared. “Step down right…”

Bam! The sound of a tail striking the floor, it cut through the Elder’s words like a sharp knife.

“Silence.”

Giving off a dangerous vibe,

Shasuryu's voice carried the guttural sound that Lizardmen made when riled up, the tension in the room increased sharply as the heated atmosphere from earlier cooled down.

In this atmosphere, an Elder opened his mouth without paying attention to the gazes around him who were warning him, "Don't do anything unnecessary."

"But Clan Chief, to receive special allowance just because he's your younger brother is not good. Besides, Travelers are—"

"I said to be silent. Didn't you hear me?"

"Geh."

“Presently, all who are seated here possess wisdom. Why not hear the idea of the Traveler.”

“Travelers are—”

“The Clan Chief has spoken and you still refuse to comply?”

Moving his sight from the silenced Elder, Zaryusu looked at the other Heads.

“Elder Druid, Head Warrior, Head Hunter, do you also think there’s no value in listening?”

“Zaryusu’s words are worth listening to.”

The Head Warrior spoke first.

“What kind of warrior would

disregard the words of Frost Pain's wielder."

"I agree, there's definite value to listening."

Then the Head Hunter spoke followed by the Elder Druid who shrugged.

"Of course we have to hear. Refusing to listen to a wise man is something that's only done by fools."

Receiving the intense mocking, some of the Elder Council's members pursed their eyebrows. Shasuryu nodded to the three Heads and let Zaryusu continue his speech. Zaryusu sat still and opened his mouth.

“To flee or to fight, if we had to decide we must choose the latter.”

“What is the reason?”

“Because it is the only choice.”

Normally, if the Clan Chief asked for the reason one must explain clearly. But Zaryusu didn’t continue and closed his mouth as if he was finished.

Shasuryu cupped his chin and sunk deep into thought.

‘...Have you seen through what I am thinking? ...Brother.’

Part 3

Zaryusu did his best not to leak his inner thoughts. At this time, the

Elder Druid showed a pained expression while directing his question to no one in particular.

“Is it possible to win?”

“Of course we can win!”

The Head Warrior shouted as if to disperse the feeling of unease, but the Elder Druid only narrowed his eyes.

“...No, in the current situation the odds of success are very low.”

The one to directly reject the Head Warrior’s opinion was Zaryusu.

“...What exactly are you trying to say?”

“Head Warrior, the opponent

should already know about our side's fighting force, otherwise they wouldn't approach us with such a belittling attitude. If that is the case, then it is impossible to obtain victory with our current fighting power."

Then what should we do? Just as everyone was about to voice out their doubts, Zaryusu spoke out before anyone else to share his inner thoughts.

"That's why we need to disrupt the plans of our enemy... Does everyone here still recall the previous war?"

"Of course."

Even those with dementia would be unable to forget the last war which

took place several years ago.

In the past these wetlands had been inhabited by seven Lizardmen tribes: Green Claw, Small Fang, Razor Tail, Dragon Tusk, Yellow Speckle, Sharp Edge and Red Eye.

However, now only five remained.

It was a war which claimed the lives of many, and wiped out two tribes.

The reason for this conflict was the bad harvest of the staple food, fish. Led by the hunter classes, the fish-hunting zone was expanded further around the lake. Of course the other tribes followed suit.

And then conflicts over hunting and fishing spots amongst the hunter classes arose. Since it concerned

food resources necessary for the survival of the tribes, it was impossible to make concessions.

Quarrels soon turned into fights, and it was only a matter of time until these fights escalated into carnage...

Next, in order to support the hunter class, the warrior class also took action. A fierce battle was sparked because of the food shortage.

Five of the seven existing tribes were embroiled in the fighting and ended up in a three vs. two situation: Green Claw, Small Fang and Razor Tail against Yellow Speckle and Sharp Edge. Apart from the warrior class, other male Lizardmen and even female

Lizardmen were mobilized to fight for their tribes.

After several large battles, the side with the three tribes that included the Green Claw emerged victorious, leaving the defeated two tribes so destitute they became unable to sustain themselves and were forced to scatter. These remnants were then absorbed by the Dragon Tusk Tribe that didn't participate in the war.

Ironically, since the number of Lizardmen had been greatly reduced, the food shortage which had originally sparked the conflict had been solved as well. The staple diet of fish could now be distributed to everybody.

“What of it?”

“Think about the words which that person left behind. He said that this village was the second, which also means that he has left a similar message at the other villages.”

“Ah.”

Numerous voices that agreed with Zaryusu’s words arose.

“It means we need to form another alliance!”

“Could it be that…”

“Yes, we should form an alliance.”

“Just like in the previous war.”

“In that case, perhaps we may yet

win?”

The small mutterings between the Lizardmen soon evolved into a big commotion. The entire hut was discussing Zaryusu’s opinion, yet Clan Chief Shasuryu maintained his silence. The chief’s eyes looked as if he was gazing into the depths of his heart, rendering Zaryusu unable to turn his face to him.

After allowing ample time for discussion, Zaryusu spoke again.

“Don’t be mistaken. The alliance I spoke of includes all of the tribes.”

“What?”

At that suggestion, the second person to understand its meaning was the Head Hunter, who let out

an astounded sound. Zaryusu's eyes locked onto Shasuryu and Lizardmen in his line of sight subconsciously parted to either side.

"Clan Chief, I also suggest forming an alliance with Dragon Tusk and Red Eye."

The surroundings erupted in an enormous commotion, as if a grenade went off in the room. They had no communications with Dragon Tooth and Red Eye that did not take part in the war. Furthermore, Dragon Tooth took in the remnants of Yellow Speckle and Sharp Edge, the refugees of their enemy tribes.

To form an alliance with those two

tribes, forming a five-tribe alliance.

If that were possible then it might be possible to win. As everyone held this faint hope, Shasuryu suddenly spoke out:

“Who shall be the representative?”

“I will go.”

Shasuryu was not surprised by Zaryusu’s immediate answer. The surrounding Lizardmen reckoned that it was because he understood his younger brother’s character and had anticipated this response. Letting out sounds of empathy, they also thought that there was no candidate more suitable to be selected. However, there was one who was of an opposing opinion.

“—Sending a traveler?”

It was Shasuryu. His ice-like gaze pierced directly through Zaryusu.

“That is true, Clan Chief. However we are in trying times. If the other side is unwilling to listen to my words merely because I am a traveler, then they have no worth as an ally.”

Zaryusu easily repelled the cold stare. After the two glared at one another for a brief moment, Shasuryu let out a lonely smile. It was either because he gave up, or because of his helplessness in stopping his brother, or perhaps internally ridiculing himself for agreeing. It was a smile without gloom.

“Bring along the seal of the Clan Chief.”

That had the meaning of being the Clan Chief’s representative. Several elders which wished to express the view that ‘this is not something a traveler should possess’ were silenced under Shasuryu’s powerful glare.

“My extreme gratitude.”

Zaryusu bowed. Accepting his gratitude, Shasuryu continued speaking:

“...I shall select the representatives who will head to the other tribes. First is...”

♦ ♦ ♦

Cold wind blew at night. Because it was the wetlands, high humidity and the summer heat combined to give people excruciating pain, however at night this heat mellowed and the gusts of wind would even be considered freezing. Of course for the Lizardmen with sturdy skin, this hardly registered as a significant change.

Zaryusu stamped along the wetlands, his target being his pet Rororo's hut.

Although there was still some time, it could not be said for certain that nothing unexpected would suddenly happen, and more so it was not known if the enemy would abide by their declared schedule, or perhaps hinder Zaryusu's movements. With all these considerations, riding through the wetlands on Rororo was still the most appropriate.

The stamping footsteps slowed down and stopped. The bag on his back which was filled with various items also shook. The reason for stopping was because the moonlight illuminated the sight of a familiar Lizardman leaving Rororo's hut.

Both individuals staggered at the sight of each other, and the

confused Zaryusu crooked his neck in a bow. The black-scaled Lizardman drew himself closer and closed the distance.

“...I reckon that you are the one more suitable to take the mantle of Clan Chief.”

Those were the only words of Shasuryu who had approached to within two meters.

“...What are you saying Elder Brother.”

“Still remember the previous large war?”

“Of course.”

Since Zaryusu had raised this question during the meeting, there

was no way he would not remember. Of course this was not the main point of Shasuryu's question.

"...After the war you became a traveler. At that time when you had the insignia burned upon your chest, you have no idea how much I regretted it. Even if I had to use my fists, I should have stopped you."

Zaryusu fiercely shook his head. His brother's expression at that time still remained a thorn in his heart.

"...It is all thanks to Elder Brother's permission that I was able to learn the ability to raise fish."

"If it were you, even if you remained in the village you would have been

able to come up with that method. Such an intelligent man as you should be able to be the supporting pillar of this village."

"Elder Brother."

The past was the past, therefore any hypothetical discussions starting with 'what if...' were pointless. The past was already set in stone, but to ponder over such events were these two men's weaknesses.

No, not exactly that either.

"...Not as Clan Chief, but as your elder brother, I cannot tell you that things will go smoothly if you go alone. Come back safely, don't try to be brave."

In response to this remark, Zaryusu

replied with a haughty smile:

“Of course I will complete this mission with perfection for you to see. This task is nothing to me.”

“Huh.” Shasuryu’s face broke out into a wry smile.

“Then if your mission were to be a failure, the fattest fish that you have raised shall be mine.”

“Elder Brother, that kind of thing is nothing amazing, and not something you ought to be saying at this moment.”

“...Muu.”

Both men silently laughed.

And then exchanged serious looks.

“So is your objective really just that?”

“...What are you saying? What do you mean?”

For a brief moment Zaryusu narrowed his eyes...and then thought to himself ‘Damn!’. With knowledge of his older brother’s insight, his reaction just now was a mistake.

“...Your speech in the hut was as if to incite everybody’s opinion, yet the way you said it was obviously withholding something.”

Zaryusu fell silent and Shasuryu continued:

“...The cause of the previous war was not solely due to the dispute

between tribes. A substantial increase in the population of Lizardmen was also one of the reasons."

"Elder Brother... Let's not talk about this any further."

Zaryusu's grim tone seemingly confirmed Shasuryu's statement.

"So...it was that."

"...It can only be that, in order to prevent a recurrence of the previous war."

These words that Zaryusu spat out implicitly contained his own detestable thoughts and plans. It was simply too foul, and if possible he did not wish for his older brother to know about them.

“So then if the other tribes refuse to form an alliance, what then? Because those who are only willing to provide support and those who wish to flee from the outset would surely refuse.”

“In that case then… The only option is to exterminate them.”

“Starting with wiping out your own tribe?”

“Elder Brother…”

Hearing the tone of persuasion in Zaryusu’s voice, Shasuryu smiled almost inappropriately.

“I understand that your concern is correct, and I also agree. As the guiding figure for the tribe, since it concerns the survival of our tribe,

of course I would have to consider this. That is why you need not be reserved, Younger Brother."

"I appreciate those words. Then shall they be brought to this village?"

"No. According to that person this village was the second one, so the main battle should take place at the first village. Ordinarily it would be the best strategy to gather at the final village or the one with the highest defense, but if it were to be destroyed then it would have a serious impact on the subsequent battles, therefore let us establish our defensive position at the first village. To exchange intelligence reports with you, let us communicate through the Elder

Druids' magic so that you can directly transmit from over there."

"Understood."

The magic which the elder brother described was a delicate one which was unable to transmit too much content or if the distance was too far away, but Zaryusu judged that it would be fine for this instance.

"Then I assume that there will be no problem if we draw out rations for the soldiers from your farm?"

"Of course, but spare the juveniles. It was not easy to get them where they are now, and even if we were to abandon the village it would eventually come in handy."

"Deal. Then how much can it

provide?”

“...If we are talking about dried consumables, around one thousand tons should not be a problem.”

“If it is that...then in the short term there will be no problems.”

“Ah, I leave it in your hands then. So, Elder Brother, let me go ahead... Rororo.”

Reacting to Zaryusu’s voice, a snake head appeared at the window. Pale blue moonlight reflected on the scales, giving off a fantasy-like beauty.

“We have to depart. Can you come over here?”

Rororo looked for a moment at

Zaryusu and Shasuryu, and retreated its head back inside. Then a sound came out like that of a heavy animal moving through water.

“Elder Brother, there are still some issues which I wish to hear about, are you able to answer? What about the numbers? Depending on the situation we need equipment to be used for negotiations.”

Shasuryu paused slightly, then replied:

“...Ten warriors, twenty hunters, three druids, seventy females, a hundred males, children...that’s about it.”

“...Ah, I understand.”

Shasuryu gave a tired smile and Zaryusu remained silent. A sudden loud water noise broke the silence. Both men observed the direction where the noise came from, and smiled out of nostalgia.

“Ah, Elder Brother, me too. I did not expect it to grow so big. When I picked it up, it was so small.”

“I also find it hard to believe, it was already quite large when you brought it back.”

The two men reminisced about the past Rororo. Then four snake heads surfaced on the water a short distance from the hut, all four using the same action in splitting the water and heading towards Zaryusu.

Suddenly the snake raised its heads and the figure of an enormous body could be seen inside the water. The beast had four reptilian heads connected through long necks to the enormous four-legged body.

It was a monster, a Hydra.

This was the name of Rororo's species.

It was not only evident from the snake elements, but also recognizable from the chewing sound when it was fed with fish.

With an unexpectedly fast movement unbefitting of its large body that spanned five meters in length, it arrived beside Zaryusu.

Zaryusu climbed onto Rororo's

back as nimble as a monkey.

“You have to return safely. In addition, it’s more your style not to use your brain like you did in the past when you shouted ‘not even one person shall be sacrificed’.”

“...I have also matured, that is what happened.”

To Zaryusu’s words, Shasuryu snorted.

“The kid has grown into a man now... Well, alright. Don’t get into trouble. If you do not come back, the first target to be attacked will be determined.”

“I will return safely. Just wait for me, Elder Brother.”

After some time passed, they exchanged gazes filled with emotion and without warning, the two drew apart.

Part 4

The 9th Floor of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. This floor had many rooms of various types. It went without saying that these included guild members' and NPCs' rooms, but also included imitations of large communal baths, cafeterias, beauty salons, clothing stores, grocery stores, fitness salons, nail salons and numerous other types of facility rooms.

The creation of these rooms had no actual significance for gameplay. It was because the players here had

an attachment to these things, or perhaps due to the players' pursuit of an ideal city, or perhaps a longing for these features due to the poor working conditions in real life.

Within these rooms, there was one particular room whose manager was the Great Tomb of Nazarick's deputy chef. Although his ability would normally be used in the cafeteria, according to certain days of the week and time of the day he would come to this room and make preparations for those that might stop by.

The room was designed in the concept of a bar with few regular customers and was illuminated with soft gentle light.

There was a shelf lined with alcohol behind the counter and eight chairs. Although there were only these features, it was sufficient for a quiet tasting. The deputy chef thought of this space as his own castle, and it gave him immense satisfaction and fulfillment

However the atmosphere of the place also relied upon customers having refined taste. He realized this minutes after today's first customer was welcomed in.

Glug, glug, glug, phew—

Making a sound like that, that person downed their drink.

While wiping the glass, he thought to himself: 'For people who drink

like that, there are more suitable places.'

In fact, the 9th Floor also had common rooms and tavern facilities, so there was no necessity for those who drank like that to come to this bar.

The deputy chef struggled to keep his face from contorting at the sight of the person chugging down the approximately 500 ml beer mug and then slamming it onto the counter.

"One more!"

Responding to the customer's request, the deputy chef injected a continuous stream of Polish-distilled vodka, and then injected a

shot of blue food coloring.

He then gently presented the cup.

“This drink is called ‘Lady’s Tears’.”

The customer looked at the drink with suspicion. After being casually informed of this name, and because she did not see the cocktail mixing process, the customer then revealed an expression of gratitude.

“Ah, does the spreading blue color symbolize a tear?”

“Yes, it is just as you say.”

He lied through his teeth.

The woman grabbed the cup, placed it beside her mouth and drained it in one gulp like one would with a

glass of milk after a shower.

With no hesitation she slammed the empty cup on the counter like with her previous drink.

“Huu, feeling a little tipsy~”

“You drank too fast, so it cannot be helped. How about retiring a little early tonight?”

“...No, I do not want to go back.”

“Is that so...”

While wiping the glass, he felt annoyed by the woman’s gaze.

‘Wanting to say something, yet unwilling to speak out, that is why women are so troublesome. Gentlemen are more suitable for

this kind of establishment, not troublesome women. Barring women from entering...is impossible, it would be too disrespectful to the Supreme Rulers. I really messed up this time.'

The one who invited her was none other than himself. This was the result of him greeting her out of concern on the 9th Floor upon seeing her distraught appearance. He now regretted his actions, but since he had offered to be a host, it was also necessary for him to display etiquette as a bar owner to the customer.

'Even though I am serving drinks made sloppily, I have to handle this properly!'

Having resolved himself, he asked:

“What is the matter, Shalltear-sama?”

In that moment the woman, Shalltear, prepared to answer as if she was waiting all along for this question to be asked, proving that his conjecture was correct.

“Sorry, but I do not wish to talk about it.”

‘Stop kidding me.’ His face involuntarily contorted, but since he was a mushroom man, the woman could not comprehend his facial movements. Neither did she say anything, merely continuing to toy with the drink glass on the counter.

“A bit drunk?”

“...Yes, that is true.”

‘...That is not possible.’

Shalltear seemed to feel that she was already drunk, but he was certain that it was impossible.

Intoxication and poison were seen as the same type, so a person who had absolute immunity against poison could not possibly be drunk. Of course, Shalltear, being undead, was immune to toxins and could not become drunk. Basically, those who came to his store either unequipped poison-neutralizing items, or knew that they would not be drunk and just wanted to enjoy this atmosphere.

Except, Shalltear genuinely felt that

she was drunk, intoxicated due the atmosphere.

‘Well then, what to do?’ he thought. Fortunately at this moment he heard the ringing sound of salvation. He lowered his head to the arriving customer.

“Welcome.”

“It’s good to see you, Piki.”

The person who shouted out the nickname given to him because of his mushroom-like appearance. He was a regular patron here, the butler assistant by the name of Eckleya, accompanied by the male servant who was carrying him.

As usual, Eckleya was silently placed upon the chair. For Eckleya

who was one meter in height, sitting on the tall bar stools was a difficult task.

Piki felt it was odd that Shalltear didn't make any greeting. He turned to face her, and found her with her head facing downwards as she was mumbling something. Listening carefully, it seemed that she was making an apology to the Supreme Ruler.

Eckleya ordered wine with fake grandeur:

"That one."

"Understood."

Hearing that, only one specific drink floated to mind, one which involved the synthesis of ten

different strong spirits to produce a ten-colored drink: the Nazarick.

The exterior appearance was extremely beautiful, and the taste was deeply satisfying, with regular customers often commenting that it deserved the name of Nazarick. However, it was not something he would recommend to others.

In order to make it even more delicious, he had gone through much trial and error, and it was still incomplete.

With skillful movements he produced the ten-colored drink and placed it in front of Eckleya.

“The lady over there, please try this.”

After this, a plick...plock...bang noise could be heard.

Eckleya wanted to slide the cup over to her on the counter. However that move was something only found in mangas or performed by people with great skill, and definitely not something a penguin could pull off.

Piki picked up the dropped glass, confirmed that it was not damaged and let out a sigh of relief. He then took out a cloth and wiped the spilled drink off the counter. With displeased eyes, he spoke slowly:

“Could you please refrain from waving your flipper around? If you insist on doing that, I will put you in a basin and push you out.”

“...I’m really sorry.”

Becoming aware of Eckleya for the first time, Shalltear raised her head and greeted.

“Ah, if it isn’t Eckleya. It’s been a while.”

“A while... But we see each other every time I come to the 9th Floor.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes it is, but... I hardly ever see you in this bar. I thought that only Guardians like Demiurge come here. Last time, him and Cocytus came together to appreciate their drinks quietly.”

“Oh, is that so?”

Hearing her comrade's words, Shalltear's eyes widened.

"What's the problem? Why are you acting like this?"

"It's no big deal... No... I've committed a grave mistake, that is why I'm finding comfort in alcohol, just like a failure would."

Eckleya made a subtle facial gesture toward Piki, silently enquiring, "What is it with this girl?" but Piki didn't reply to this, and merely shook his head.

Since he wanted to give them a more enjoyable drinking experience, he asked:

"To lighten up the mood, how about some apple juice?"

The two of them were surprised by this suggestion.

“Made from apples picked from the 6th Floor.”

Their curiosity was aroused and both of them nodded at the same time. Their straightforward reactions gave Piki a strong sense of satisfaction.

What was then placed on the table were two portions of unremarkable apple juice. His eyes drifted over to the male servant, but as usual, his offer was declined.

Of course, Eckleya had a penguin’s beak, so he had not forgotten to include a straw.

“A refreshing taste.”

“Although it isn’t bad, it lacks impact... Perhaps it is not sweet enough?”

That was the impression the two people had after finishing it in one go.

“Well, it cannot be helped. I tasted a sample when I brought it over, and compared to those stored in Nazarick, its flavor is insufficient.”

“There are apple trees on the 6th Floor? I don’t recall there being any.”

Wherever Shalltear had heard of this impression before, she gave the correct answer before Piki replied:

“Could it be that it is the one which Ainz-sama brought back? I heard

from Albedo that he was experimenting to see if outside fruits could be cultivated in Nazarick, to serve as replenishable consumables."

Piki had also heard of this.

Apart from this, he had also accepted various foods from the outside because it was his task to confirm if it was possible to produce ability-boosting cuisine.

"That's right, I heard that too. If the plan goes smoothly, next would be cultivating fruit orchards, but it looks like the sweetness is still lacking by far."

"No, it's not like it is undrinkable. I would prefer this if I am looking for

a refreshing sweetness."

"...Then who is doing the cultivation at the moment? Aura and Mare are out, could it be that this responsibility...has been given to the monsters?"

"No, no. It's delegated to the forest sprite that Ainz-sama brought back from the outside."

Wondering who it was, Eckleya made a puzzled expression, whereas Shalltear let out an expression of realization.

"What is happening? Have there been new people joining Nazarick?"

Shalltear answered Eckleya's question. Although Piki had seen the forest sprite, he did not know

how the situation came to be and so he perked his ears to listen.

It seemed that the forest sprite was brought back after the battle to confirm the Guardians' teamwork. As a result of some agreement, it came to Nazarick and became an apple farmer.3

"Nazarick is also evolving, becoming more powerful."

Both Piki and Shalltear agreed with Eckleya's words.

As deputy chef, Piki had no idea of the future plans for the Great Tomb of Nazarick. But now he understood that Ainz Ooal Gown, the final remaining Supreme Ruler, had put his full effort into gaining power in

this world and becoming more powerful.

“I see. Then in the future there may be more entities like that forest sprite joining the ranks of Nazarick.”

Shalltear puffed up her cheeks and vented her dissatisfaction at Eckleya.

“I detest this. For this place created by the Supreme Rulers... Why should those filthy things be allowed to roam these grounds?”

He also shared the same sentiment. This place was blessed with the presence of the Supreme Rulers. For those who were born in this place, the mere thought of outsiders being

allowed to enter would cause them to frown, but there was a point more important than his personal thoughts.

“We have to endure this. It is Ainz-sama’s decision after all.”

As the highest Supreme Ruler, Ainz Ooal Gown’s decision was absolute. If he said something white was black, then it had to be black.

“I did not mean to question Ainz-sama’s decisions!”

Toward the panicking Shalltear, the two others also nodded in agreement.

“Then in the future we also need to become role models, displaying more loyalty to Ainz-sama. I don’t

think anybody but you will rebel against Ainz-sama."

"That is true. Speaking of which, how is it Shalltear? If you join me now, I will grant you an even higher status in the future—"

Eckleya started his usual recruitment talk—which would never succeed, but was interrupted by a strange scream.

"Hyaaaaa~~"

Both men's stares were directed at Shalltear who was covering her head and ceaselessly professing her loyalty.

"...What happened? Her tone is different from normal too."

In response to the astounded Eckleya, Piki shook his head and shrugged.

“Who knows?”

Chapter 2: Gathering, Lizardmen

Part 1

It had already been a half-day journey riding on Rororo through

the wetlands. The sun was already high in the sky, yet Zaryusu had not encountered any enemies he was concerned about, and arrived safely at his destination.

In the wetlands, there were several residences with houses constructed in the same fashion as those of the Green Claw Tribe, surrounded by sharpened spikes facing outward on all sides. Although there were wide gaps between the spikes, it was sufficiently effective in obstructing large creatures such as Rororo from invading. Although the number of houses was less than that of the Green Claw Tribe, individually, each one was larger.

Therefore it was not clear which side had a larger population.

Every residence had a flag attached to it billowing in the wind. The flags all bore the Red Eye Lizardman mark.

Correct, this was Zaryusu's first intended destination—the settlement of the Red Eye Tribe.

After surveying his surroundings, Zaryusu sighed in relief.

This was because, fortunately for Zaryusu, their place of habitat was in the same patch of wetlands, consistent with previously obtained knowledge. He originally reckoned that they could have moved away as a result of the last war, in which case he would have to begin searching for their tribe.

Zaryusu looked back in the direction which he came from, and although he couldn't clearly see it, just narrowly outside of his line of sight was his own village. Right now, his village should be vigorously making various preparations. Although he left with anxiety, he could be fairly certain that the village would be safe from attack for the moment.

The fact that Zaryusu was able to arrive here safely was proof.

He was unable to determine whether this was a flaw in the Great One's plan, or whether his own actions were also within its calculations, but in any case the opponent did not currently intend to go back on its word, and did not

attempt to intervene in the battle preparations.

Of course, even if the so-called Great One moved his hand to interfere, Zaryusu could only act to implement his beliefs.

Zaryusu leaped down from Rororo and stretched his body. Although riding Rororo over long distances made his muscles stiff, stretching his back made the fatigue seem rather pleasant.

Following this, Zaryusu instructed Rororo to remain at this position to wait for him, then took out some dried fish from his backpack for Rororo, to serve as its breakfast and lunch.

Honestly, he wanted it to forage its own meal from around here, but refrained from giving the order due to the possibility of disturbing the Red Eye Tribe's hunting grounds.

After petting each of Rororo's heads several times, Zaryusu set off by himself and proceeded forward.

If he brought Rororo with him, the other side could feel apprehensive of the Hydra and be unwilling to come out. Zaryusu was here to form an alliance, and did not wish to appear high-handed.

He advanced while making splashing water noises.

At the corner of his vision, Zaryusu could see several Red Eye Tribe

warriors walking in a single file around the inner edge of the spike perimeter. Their equipment was exactly the same as those of the Green Claw Tribe, not wearing armor and holding wooden spears made from sharpened bone attached to the tip of a wooden staff. There were also people holding ropes used for rock slings, but since these were not loaded with rocks, it should indicate that they had no intention of immediately attacking.

Zaryusu tried as much as possible to avoid stimulating the other side, so he slowly drew closer until both sides arrived before the main entrance. He directed his gaze to the watchful Lizardmen and raised his voice.

“I am Zaryusu Shasha of the Green Claw Tribe. There is a matter I wish to discuss with your Tribal Chief!”

After a while, a venerated Lizardman holding a walking cane appeared, with five burly Lizardmen following behind him. The old Lizardman’s entire body from top to bottom had markings painted on with white body paint.

‘Is this the Elder Druid?’

Zaryusu maintained his authoritative posture.

This person before him was an equal in terms of position, therefore he could not put on an appearance of weakness. Even as the elder druid observed the mark on his chest,

Zaryusu did not falter.

“Zaryusu Shasha, of the Green Claw Tribe. I have come with a matter to discuss.”

“...Although I cannot say that you are welcomed, the leader of our tribe is willing to meet you. Please come with me.”

This strange rhetoric confused Zaryusu.

What made him perplexed was why the other individual was not called the tribal chief, and also why they did not require him to display an item to prove his identity. However, saying anything at that moment could upset the other party, and that would spell trouble. Although

he felt that something was off, Zaryusu silently followed behind the line of Lizardmen.

♦ ♦ ♦

He was brought to a beautiful small hut.

It was even larger than Zaryusu's older brother's. The walls were dyed with a rare pattern, proving that the owner of the house was of nobility.

What concerned him was that it

had no windows, only a gap for ventilation. Lizardmen could see objects clearly in the dark, but this did not mean that they enjoyed darkness.

Then why would anyone want to live inside such a dark hut?

Zaryusu had many doubts but couldn't turn to anyone for answers.

Looking behind him, the druid and warriors that led the way earlier were all gone.

When those who led the way had told him that they were leaving, he felt that they were being too careless. He almost let his doubt slip.

But when Zaryusu heard that this was the wish of the leader, of the tribe's acting chief, his opinion of the person waiting inside the hut rose.

Although he had promised his brother that he would return safely, Zaryusu was already prepared for the possibility that he would be unable to fulfill that promise. As such, surrounding him with armed guards to pressure him would prove ineffective. In fact, it would only make him feel disappointed by the fact that this was all they could muster.

However, if the other party already knew his thoughts and still displayed generosity...

‘Possibly a skilled negotiator, a troublesome opponent...’

Ignoring the peeping eyes from the distance, Zaryusu went straight to the door and announced in a loud voice:

“I am Zaryusu Shasha of the Green Claw Tribe, and I have come here to meet with the leader of the tribe.”

A small voice from within responded in kind, the voice of a female. It granted him permission to enter.

Zaryusu opened the door without hesitation.

The interior was as dark as he had imagined.

Because of the difference in brightness, even if he had night vision capabilities, Zaryusu could not help but to blink a few times.

The air inside smelled something akin to medicine, mixed with the scent of herbs that stabbed the nose. Zaryusu visualized an elderly female Lizardman, but this was negated by reality.

“Welcome.”

A voice spoke out from within the darkness. He had mistaken the voice from behind the door as elderly. But hearing it close up, it contained a youthful energy.

Finally accustomed to the change in light, a Lizardman appeared in front

of his eyes.

White.

This was Zaryusu's first impression.

Snow-white scales, a spotless purity. Round, bright red eyes like rubies, and slim limbs that did not belong to a male, but to a female.

Her entire body was covered in red and black patterns, meaning that she was an adult, able to use a variety of magic and was...unmarried.

Zaryusu had once been stabbed by a spear in the past.

In that moment, Zaryusu felt his body burn fiercely as if it had been pierced by a hot iron stake and

likewise his heart also accompanied this by beating rapidly, both combining to produce a feeling of pain shooting across his entire body.

There was no pain, but then...

Zaryusu was lost for words as he stood motionless.

Having interpreted his silence in her own way, she merely gave a self-deprecating smile.

“It seems that I am a strange sight even for the wielder of one of the four treasures, Frost Pain.”

Albinos in nature were exceedingly rare, partially because they were too conspicuous. It made it difficult for them to survive.

The somewhat civilized Lizardmen had a similar tendency weak to sunlight and bad eyesight, they had not reached a level of civilization where such feeble individuals could survive. Therefore it was extremely rare to come across an albino adult. There were even cases where they were killed at birth.

It should already be considered fortunate if albinos were seen as detestable existences by ordinary Lizardmen. There were even some who saw them as a kind of monster, that was why she had a self-mocking attitude.

However Zaryusu was not like that.

“...What is it?”

The female Lizardman inside asked a surprised question toward the motionless Zaryusu standing at the door. Without reacting to the question, Zaryusu let out a tremolo cry.

Hearing this sound, the female Lizardman widened her eyes and opened her mouth, in surprise, confusion and in embarrassment.

That sound was none other than a courtship cry.

Zaryusu came back to his senses and realized what he had done. Just like how a human's ears would turn red, he flicked his tail repeatedly in agitation.

"Ah, no, wrong, wait not wrong, not

that, this isn't what I..."

Zaryusu's frantic movements caused the female Lizardman to calm down, and she smiled, making Zaryusu puzzled.

"Please calm down. It's troubling if you move so violently."

"Ah! Sorry."

Zaryusu hung his head, made an apology and then entered the room. At the same time the female Lizardman's tail drooped as if she had finally relaxed. However, the very tip of her tail was still fluttering, indicating that she was not entirely calm.

"Please come over."

“...My sincere gratitude.”

Entering into the home, Zaryusu saw that the area where she was indicating had a cushion woven from an unknown plant. He sat on it, and she sat opposite to him.

“This is the first time we have met, I’m a traveler of the Green Claw Tribe, Zaryusu Shasha.”

“Thank you for your courtesy. I am the acting chief of the Red Eye Tribe, Crusch Lulu.”

After the introductions were over, the two observed each other as if to guess each other’s intentions.

The hut was temporarily submerged in silence, but this could not be allowed to continue. Zaryusu was a

guest, therefore it should be the host Crusch who should say the first word.

“First, mister messenger, I believe there is no need for us to be so formal. I would like for us to speak freely, so please make yourself comfortable.”

Accepting the proposal to speak without reserve, Zaryusu nodded.

“I am truly grateful for that, since I am not accustomed to speaking with a serious and formal tone.”

“Then do you mind sharing the reason for your visit?”

Although she asked, Crusch already had a rough idea.

The mysterious undead which appeared at the center of the village. Magic that controlled the weather, 4th tier magic 「Control Cloud」. And now the male Lizardman from a different tribe, one who could even be called a hero.

From here, there could only be one expected answer. As Crusch pondered on how to deal with Zaryusu's reply—she felt all of her expectations shatter.

"...Please marry me."

.....

.....?

.....?!

“...Ha?!”

For an instant, Crusch doubted her ears.

“Actually, this was not my original purpose for coming here. I fully know that this should wait until after my objective is completed. But I can’t lie to my heart. You may laugh at this foolish male.”

“A...a...ah...ha.”

These were words which she had never heard since the moment of her birth, and ought to have no relevance to her. Her thoughts were torn to shreds in a turbulent storm, scattering all over the place and as such she couldn’t organize them.

Toward such a flustered Crusch,

Zaryusu revealed a forced smile and continued to speak:

“I apologize, I don’t know what to say, we are currently facing a contingency. Your response can wait until this is over.”

“Uh, ha...haha.”

Finally able to piece together her psyche and successfully resume her thoughts, Crusch regained her composure. However, upon immediately recalling Zaryusu’s words from a moment ago, her thoughts once again slipped into disarray.

Crusch tried to secretly take a peek at the male’s face in front of her which had an extremely calm

expression.

‘Saying something like that to me, but he’s still so calm... Perhaps he frequently proposes to other people?! Or perhaps he is already accustomed to this having been proposed so often? ...Although he certainly is rather dashing... Ah, what am I thinking! This is part of his plan, it must be, intending to control me, making a proposal to me and proclaiming love. P-P-Proposing to someone like me...’

She, who had never had the experience of being treated as a female, was unable to keep her cool and failed to notice that the tip of Zaryusu’s tail was also slightly trembling. The man in front of her was also using strength of will to

control his emotions from displaying themselves.

That was why a period of silence resulted. Both individuals required some silent time to allow the exuberance to settle.

Barely ten minutes later, it seemed possible to finally return to the original topic at hand.

Crusch intended to ask Zaryusu again for the reason for his visit, but remembered the words from earlier.

'...Just how do you bring that up!'

With a slap, Crusch's tail hit the floorboards. The male in front of her flinched, almost as if he was the one who was struck.

This action was too impolite, and Crusch panicked inside.

Even if he was only a traveler, the other person was also a tribe representative...and furthermore not just any ordinary Lizardman, but the hero who wielded Frost Pain. Impoliteness toward such a person could surely not be forgiven.

'But this is your fault! What's more, say something!'

Zaryusu was in fact reflecting in embarrassment on his rash actions, and had chosen to remain silent. However Crusch, who was preoccupied with her emotions as if she was putting a lid over an active volcano, did not notice this at all.

The silence continued, but since this was not a solution to the current situation, Crusch who had realized this decided that it was best to change the topic.

“Since you are not fearful of my body, perhaps it is not surprising that you are a hero?”

Towards Crusch’s barbed words, Zaryusu wore a look of confusion that showed he was clueless as to what she was saying.

Crusch also wondered just what exactly she was thinking.

“Not afraid of my albino body, I mean.”

“...It’s like the white snow that covers the top of the mountain

range.”

“...Eh?”

“...A beautiful color.”

Of course, she had never heard this line once in her life.

‘W-What is this male saying!’

The internal pressure building up within Crusch reached a point at which it could no longer be contained, the lid holding it in was blown off with this single phrase. While Crusch was lost in the chaos of her own thoughts, Zaryusu smoothly reached out and stroked her scales. Their bright color was of a polished beauty...and on those slightly cool scales his hands moved downward like water in a flowing

river.

Hiss! It was a short warning noise, but something else was mixed within her breath as well.

It gave both the chance to regain some of their lost composure.

The two realized what was just done to her and what he just did subconsciously. Their entire bodies trembled. ‘Why did I do that? Why did I let him?’ Doubt became anxiety, and anxiety led to confusion.

As a result, two tails slammed the floor, violently enough to shake the hut.

Then both of them looked at each other, and confirmed the status of

the other's tail. As if time had stopped, both tails stopped moving.

"....."

"....."

The atmosphere was heavy, or perhaps better described as tense. Silence fell upon the two individuals, followed by the two secretly stealing glances at each other. Finally managing to get her thoughts in order, Crusch asked him with an icy gaze, determined to detect any lies in his words.

"...Why did you...all of a sudden?"

Although Crush had trouble expressing her thoughts in words, Zaryusu appeared to have understood as he replied honestly

and without hesitation.

“It was love at first sight. Besides, death may result from the war this time, and I do not wish to leave any regrets behind.”

This simple honesty, his words that hid none of his emotions made Crusch momentarily at a loss for words. However, there was a part that she just could not relate to.

“...Even the wielder of that famous Frost Pain is prepared to die in battle?”

“Correct. The opponent is an incomprehensible enemy, one which cannot be taken lightly... Have you seen the monster that acted as the messenger? The one

which came to our settlement had this appearance…”

Crusch accepted the illustration which Zaryusu passed over, and nodded after giving it a cursory glance.

“Yes. It was the exact same monster.”

“Do you know what kind of monster that was?”

“No. Including me, no one in the tribe had any idea.”

“Is that so…actually I have come across that kind of monster once before…” Zaryusu spoke up to this point and paused to observe Crusch’s response as he continued “…and I fled.”

“—Eh?”

“It was impossible to defeat. No, to put it nicely, it was a fifty-fifty chance of dying.”

Crusch then understood that the monster was such a terrifying undead, and heaved a sigh of relief that her decision to stop the warriors back then was the right decision.

“It can emit a scream that causes mental confusion. Not only that, it has an ethereal body, therefore it is almost entirely immune towards attacks with weapons which are not magically enchanted. Using numbers will not work.”

“Amongst the magic which our

druids use, there is a kind of magic which can temporarily imbue magic on swords…"

"…Is it able to defend against mental attacks?"

"It is able to strengthen the resistance, but protecting everyone's mental state would be too much and our strength would be insufficient."

"So it's like that…are all the druids able to use that magic?"

"If it is strengthening resistance, almost all of the druids are capable of it. But I'm the only one in this tribe who can shield the mind from confusion."

Crusch noticed that Zaryusu's

breathing had shifted ever so slightly. It seemed that he had already noticed that Crusch's position was not merely an empty title.

Correct. The Lizardman Crusch Lulu was an extremely skilled Forest Druid. Maybe even above some of the other elder druids amongst the Lizardmen.

"...Which number was the Red Eye Tribe in order of the tribes that were attacked?"

"The opponent said we are the fourth."

"I see...then, what are your plans?"

Time passed by.

Crusch was contemplating whether revealing the plans would be beneficial. The Green Claw Tribe would certainly choose to go to war, and Zaryusu's objective in coming here should be to form an alliance, requesting to head to battle together. With that in mind, what should be done for the bests interests of the Red Eye Tribe?

The Red Eye Tribe originally did not intend to form an alliance. Their opinion was to choose to seek refuge. Going to war against people able to use 4th tier magic was an incredibly foolish idea. Moreover, knowing that the undead which were sent out by the opponent possessed such terrifying abilities made it more obvious that there could not be any other verdict.

However, was honestly revealing such thoughts really for the best?

Toward Crusch who was trapped in her own thoughts, Zaryusu narrowed his eyes, and opened his mouth to speak:

“Let me tell you what I truly think.”

Having no idea what Zaryusu was about to say, Crusch looked at him with unblinking eyes.

“What I am worried about is what happens after seeking refuge.”

To Crusch who was unable to understand the meaning of this sentence, Zaryusu calmly continued.

“Do you think that after moving

away from a familiar environment which you are used to living in, you will be able to maintain the same lifestyle as the one right now?"

"Impossible...no, it would be rather difficult."

If they were to leave here and establish a new place of habitat, they would have to fight with their lives on the line——they would have to win the fight for survival. The reality was that Lizardmen were actually not the only occupants of this lake, and they had obtained this piece of wetlands after many tiresome years of warring. For this kind of species, it was not possible to easily set up a new habitat in unfamiliar environments.

“There’s also more than enough chance that there wouldn’t be enough food.”

“Probably so.”

Crusch, who was unable to understand what this male Lizardman standing in front of her was getting at, replied with a sharp, suspicious voice.

“Then, if the nearby five tribes seek refuge at the same time, what do you think will happen?”

“That...!”

Crusch fell silent, because she already figured out the true meaning behind Zaryusu’s words.

Although the size of the lake was

quite vast, when a tribe would choose a certain area to serve as a place of refuge, that area should also be the place that other tribes would want to obtain. Therefore, just moving to a new place could trigger another fight for survival, nearby would also have opponents who would fight for fish as the main source of food. Like this, what kind of situation would play out? Finally, there would be no guarantee that the most feared result would arise, that being a war just like the one in the past.

“Don’t tell me…the reason you want to fight even though we might not win…”

“…That’s right. With the other tribes combined, I’m considering

how many less mouths we can feed."

"For something like that!"

That was why he wanted to form an army. So even if they lose the battle, there would be less Lizardmen to feed.

In a war for survival, it would be extreme but understandable to think that everyone aside from the battle-ready warriors, hunters and druids were expendable. No, in the long-term it might be better if the rest simply died.

Less mouths to feed meant less food required to survive. In that case, even coexistence might be possible.

Crusch frantically tried to think of reasons to reject his idea.

“You don’t even know how dangerous the new location will be, yet you want to start from the beginning with reduced numbers?”

“Then I’ll ask you this. Let’s say we easily win the battle for survival, what then? If our fish dwindle, will the five tribes fight one another next?”

“We may be able to catch more fish!”

“And if we can’t?”

She could not answer in the face of Zaryusu’s chilling barrage of questions.

Zaryusu acted with what was the closest to a worst-case scenario in mind. Crusch thought with wishful thinking as her foundation. If a bad situation arose, her choices would lead to disaster, while Zaryusu's would not.

And even if they were to be defeated and the number of adult Lizardmen decreased, they would have died a glorious death in battle.

"...If you refuse, we will have to attack the Red Eyes first."

The dark tone of his voice caused Crusch to flinch.

It was a declaration that they would not allow only the Red Eyes to flee to a new land with their members

intact.

That was the correct, reasonable judgement.

If a tribe with reduced numbers fled to a refuge where the Red Eyes, with their full strength undiminished, had settled, the only thing that awaited them there would be doom. Considering the danger, the only measure would be a preemptive attack. It was an obvious choice for one responsible for an entire tribe. If she herself had been in that position, she would also have made the same decision.

“Even if we lose the war, I believe that allying with us will lower the chance of there being bloodshed between our tribes in the new

habitat."

Crusch, unable to understand what he meant, showed an honest, confused expression on her face. Zaryusu explained himself so that his real intentions would become clear.

"It will plant a sense of camaraderie. Rather than as different tribes, we will be able to recognize one another as allies who fought together."

'That's right.'

Crusch chewed Zaryusu's words in her mouth.

He was claiming the possibility that tribes that spilled blood together would not be so quick to war

against each other if food became scarce. But her own ideas and experience caused her to doubt. With her face slightly lowered, as soon as she was about to fall into deep thought, Zaryusu posed a question.

“By the way, how did the Red Eyes overcome that period?”

It felt like being stabbed by a needle. Before she herself realized it, Crusch jumped up. Seeing his face straight-on, she could see the surprise on Zaryusu’s face, the one who had asked the question.

‘Ah, he asked because he really didn’t know.’

Although she had known him only

for a short time, Crusch had grasped the basics of his personality, of the male named Zaryusu. She intuitively realized that it was not a question to threaten them.

Crusch narrowed her eyes and stared at Zaryusu. Her gaze was so sharp that it seemed like it would pierce a hole through him. Unable to understand the reason for her glare, she saw how it made him feel helpless. But even so, Crusch could not control herself.

“—Is there a reason that I need to tell you?”

She spat out her words, tone brimming with loathing. The change in Crusch made him doubt

whether he was talking to the same person.

But Zaryusu could not back down. It might contain the answer that would let everyone survive.

“I would like to hear it. Was it a druid power? Or was there another method? Therein could be our salvation...”

Zaryusu stopped there and closed his mouth.

If it really did hold the answer, there was no way that Crusch would look as pained as she did now.

As if she read his mind, Crusch snorted like she was ridiculing everything, including herself.

“You’re right. That is no salvation.”

After a pause, she wore an exhausted smile and continued.

“What we did was a war of fratricide—we ate our dead.”

Zaryusu was unable to open his mouth from the shock that overcame him. Killing the weak—reducing the mouths to feed was not taboo. But eating your own was a foul act and a taboo amongst taboos.

‘Why is she telling me this willingly? This is something that should be taken to the grave. Why did she reveal it to an outsider, an envoy? Does she intend to not let me leave alive? No, this isn’t that

sort of atmosphere.'

Crusch herself could not understand why she told him.

She knew well how much scorn this would invite from the other tribes. So why—

Her mouth moved smoothly, as if it was not her own.

"That day, when a different tribe started the war, our tribe also had serious food shortages and was in a dangerous situation. But the reason our tribe did not participate in the war was because we were composed of many druids and few warriors. Our druids were able to create food through magic."

Crusch's mouth did not show any

signs of stopping, as if it was being controlled by a different consciousness.

“But the food our druids made just wasn’t enough, not if you were to compare it with the size of the tribe as a whole. The only choice left to us was to walk the path of gradual destruction. Then one day, our Tribal Chief brought back food. Bright red meat.”

‘—Maybe I wanted him to listen… to my sin.’

Crusch grinded her teeth together. The male in front of her listened quietly. Even if he was disgusted, he hid it and listened.

For that, Crusch was grateful.

“Everyone vaguely knew what kind of meat that was. For the moment, we made strict laws and anyone who broke them were banished. The only time the Tribal Chief would bring back meat was after someone had been banished. Even so, we all closed our eyes and ate in order to survive. But something like that could never last very long. The grievances that piled up suddenly all exploded one day and took the form of a revolt.”

With her eyes closed, she remembered their chief.

“We ate…we knew and still ate. That makes us accomplices and yet…looking back on it now, it’s laughable.”

Crusch finished a silent prayer and stared straight at Zaryusu's face. She looked into his quiet eyes and saw that they harbored no disgust. She felt surprised from the joy that sprouted from somewhere in her heart.

Why did she feel happy?

Crusch too, vaguely knew the answer to that question.

"...Look at me. Once in a while, someone like me is born in the Red Eye Tribe. Since ancient times, they will display a power. In my case, it was the power of a druid. This leads to us having authority that almost rivals that of the Tribal Chief... And I was the center of the rebellion that split the tribe in half. We won

because we had the greater numbers."

"And in the end, the food was divided up evenly amongst those who were left?"

"Yes...as a result our tribe managed to survive. During the rebellion—that time, the Tribal Chief never surrendered. He died with countless injuries. And when he received the final blow, he smiled at me."

As if she was coughing up blood, Crusch continued to speak.

It was the pus that slowly coalesced in her heart, ever since she killed the tribal chief.

The pus that she could never reveal to the members of the tribe who

trusted her and fought against their chief, Crusch was just barely able to confess it to the one named Zaryusu. That was why her words did not stop, like water emptying out at the bottom.

“They were not the eyes of someone staring at their killer. No hatred, jealousy, hostility, curses, none of it. It was such a beautiful smile! The chief always faced reality directly and acted. And we...we acted on our ideals and hostility. Maybe the one who was in the right was the Tribal Chief! That’s what I always think about! Because the chief died—the one who was regarded as the root of all evil, our tribe was able to unite as one once more. And what’s even worse, since our numbers were smaller, we even got the gift of no

more food problems!”

This was her limit.

As the acting tribal chief, as the one who shouldered the sin, desperately enduring it all, the force of her collapse was as great as her struggle. The overflowing muddy stream swallowed everything. The thoughts that had been torn to shreds, it was difficult to change them with words alone.

With a faint noise, although her tears did not fall, mentally, she was crying.

It was a small body.

It was agreed that in nature, weakness was a sin. Of course, children were to be protected, but

regardless, both male and female Lizardmen emphasized strength as a virtue. On that point, the female in front of him could only be seen as an object of ridicule. One who gathered a tribe, how could she show such weakness in front of a stranger, one from a different tribe nonetheless?

However, what Zaryusu felt in his heart was a completely different emotion.

It could have been because she was a beautiful female. But as much as he thought so, he believed that the one before him was a warrior. Wounded, groaning, in torment, but still she tried to walk forward. His thought was that a warrior of such caliber only briefly showed a

moment of weakness.

One who tried to stand and walk forward, that person was not weak.

Zaryusu approached her and hugged Crusch around her shoulders.

“—We are neither omniscient nor omnipotent. We can only choose our course in the moment. I may have acted similarly had I been in the same position. But I don’t wish to console you. Just where would one find an answer that is wholly correct in this world. We merely walk forward, the soles of our feet bearing countless wounds from our regrets and suffering. You as well, your only option is to move forward. This is what I believe.”

As their body temperatures transferred to one another, though slight, they could feel the beating of their hearts through their bodies. They were caught in the illusion of the two beating hearts matching their rhythm and slowly becoming one.

It was a mysterious sensation.

Zaryusu felt a warmth that he had never before experienced since the day he was born. It wasn't because he was hugging a Lizardman.

'Is it because I'm holding this female, Crusch Lulu?'

After a while, Crusch separated herself from Zaryusu's body.

The heat leaving him was

regrettable, but he could not mention it out of embarrassment.

“I’ve shown you something shameful...do you scorn me?”

“Just which part of it was shameful? And do you see me as the type of foolish male to scorn someone getting up and walking forward through the pain and suffering? You are beautiful.”

“——! ——!!”

A white tail repeatedly slammed against the floor.

“What should I do.”

Without even being able to ask the muttering Crusch what she meant, Zaryusu asked a different question.

“Anyway, does the Red Eye Tribe cultivate fish?”

“Cultivate?”

“Right, it’s raising the fish that will become food.”

“We do not. Fish are nature’s blessing, after all.”

The cultivation that Zaryusu was talking of was a technique that was not known to any of the Lizardmen tribes. The idea that they could raise their prey with their own hands was an idea that was fundamentally different from their way of thinking.

“That seems to be the druid way of thinking. Would you not care to compromise? Raise the fish with

the sole purpose of eating them. The druids of my own tribe agreed."

Crusch nodded her head.

"Then I will teach you how to cultivate fish. The important part is what you feed them. You can give them the fruits created from the druids' magic. That'll greatly enhance their growth."

"Is it really okay for you to share that?"

"Of course. There's no use in keeping it hidden. It's more important that many tribes survive using this method."

Crusch deeply bowed her head and raised her tail high.

“Thank you.”

“Your gratitude…there is no need. In return, I wish to ask you again.”

The gratitude disappeared from Crusch’s face. Seeing her behavior, Zaryusu calmed his heart.

The question that absolutely could not be avoided. Both Zaryusu and Crusch inhaled at the same time.

And he asked.

“What will be the Red Eye Tribe’s course of action regarding the upcoming war?”

“…From the consensus of yesterday’s meeting, we will be fleeing.”

“Then I will ask Crusch Lulu, the acting Tribal Chief. And today, is the decision unchanged?”

Crusch did not answer.

Her answer here would determine the fate of the Red Eye Tribe. It was obvious that she would hesitate.

However, there was nothing for Zaryusu to do here. All he could do was smile awkwardly.

“...It’s your decision. The reason that the previous Tribal Chief smiled at you was probably because he was leaving the future of the tribe in your hands. Then now is the time for you carry out your mission. I have said everything there is to say. All that is left is for you to

choose."

Crusch's eyes darted searchingly around the interior of the hut. She was neither looking for an escape, nor seeking help. But simply to draw out the correct answer from within herself.

Whatever she decided, Zaryusu would accept it.

"I will ask as the acting Tribal Chief. How many refugees are you planning to evacuate?"

"For each tribe's refugees I'm considering ten warriors, twenty hunters, three druids, seventy males, a hundred females, and a few children."

"...And the rest?"

“—Depending on the situation, they will die.”

Crusch wordlessly stared up into space, then suddenly muttered.

“—I see.”

“Then tell me your decision, Red Eye Tribe’s acting Chief, Crusch Lulu.”

Crusch devised countless ideas.

Of course, killing Zaryusu was also one of the possible choices. She personally did not wish to kill him. But acting Chief Crusch was different. What if the whole tribe fled after killing him?

She discarded that idea. Its future was too dangerous. Also, there was

no guarantee that he really did come alone.

Then what about promising him before fleeing.

This could also become a problem. If things went wrong, it would set off a war between them and the Red Eye Tribe. They would become a target of population depletion. The other side's true intentions would be to reduce the population, it would not matter who the target was.

In the end, he figured that should the answer be no to forming an alliance, Zaryusu would probably return to his village and lead an army here to exterminate the Red Eye Tribe.

However, not knowing if Zaryusu had realized, there was one loophole. In the end, the food problem wouldn't be resolved.

Crusch suddenly smiled. From the very start there was no way out. From the moment Zaryusu suggested to her to form an alliance; from the start when the Green Claw Tribe's phase of action began—

There was only one path of survival for the Red Eye Tribe, that was to form an alliance with the others and participate together in the war. Likewise, Zaryusu should have understood this reasoning.

Even so, he had to wait for Crusch to personally respond. He probably

wanted to discern whether Crusch who was in command of the tribe's Lizardmen, had the qualifications to become an alliance partner.

All that was left was whether she wanted to voice out her decision.

Except, after declaring that decision, there would definitely be many individuals who would lose their lives. However—

"Let me first make one thing clear. We are not going to war for the sake of sacrificing lives, but to obtain victory. I have perhaps said many things which have made you feel unsettled. However, we want to be the ones left standing and laughing victoriously. Please do not be mistaken on this point."

Crusch nodded to express her understanding.

This male Lizardman really was kind. With such thoughts, Crusch voiced out her own decision.

"...We, the Red Eye Tribe shall cooperate with you, because I do not wish to see the Tribal Chief's smile become meaningless, and also because it will grant Red Eye Tribesmen a chance at survival."

Crusch lowered her head in a deep bow; her tail was straight and elevated.

"—I am extremely grateful."

Zaryusu nodded slightly. That elevated tail expressed complex thoughts, more intensely than his

words.

♦ ♦ ♦

Early morning.

Zaryusu stood in front of Rororo, looking towards the main entrance of the Red Eye Tribe.

He could not resist opening his mouth wide and yawning. Last night he was a guest spectator at a Red Eye conference until late at night, therefore he was currently a

little fatigued. However there was not much time left, and it was necessary to visit another tribe today.

Zaryusu desperately fought against his drowsiness, but momentarily subsided to it and gave another yawn, but the one this time was even larger than the previous one.

Although sitting on Rororo was not comfortable enough for sleeping, he felt like he was able to do so.

After taking a glimpse of the yellow sun which had just risen, Zaryusu turned his gaze back at the main entrance, and then felt some confusion. This was because a curious object had just run out of the main gate.

It was a bundle of grass.

There were weeds grown on top of clothing which was sewn together from many long strips of cloth and threads. If one were to lay on the wetlands and observe it from a distance, it would look like a bundle of weeds.

‘Ah, I believe I have seen a similar monster somewhere before—’

Zaryusu was just recalling a sight he had seen during his travels as a traveler when Rororo behind him let out a low warning growl.

Of course Zaryusu understood who that bundle of grass actually was, and it was impossible to be incorrect because her white tail was

slightly visible.

As he was staring blankly at that excitedly swaying tail while at the same time reassuring Rororo, the bundle of weeds had already arrived beside Zaryusu.

“—Good morning.”

“Un, good morning...looks like you unified the entire tribe without a hitch.”

He turned his gaze toward the Red Eye Tribe’s residences. Since early in the morning, the gathering area had already been palpitating with murderous intent. Many Lizardmen were frantically running around. Crusch also stood on one side facing the same direction and

replied:

“Yes, no problems have arisen. Today we should be able to arrive at the Razor Tail Tribe settlement, and those who wish to flee have also already packed up.”

The druids inside the village used magic to pass on a situation update. The Razor Tail Tribe was told that they would be the first tribe to be exterminated. The first tribe which would be wiped out was not the Dragon Tusk Tribe, therefore this was more advantageous in terms of timing.

“Then Crusch, why would you want to come to our side?”

“The answer is very simple,

Zaryusu, but before I give my reply, first tell me one thing. What are your plans?"

After yesterday's meeting which took place from evening to early morning, the two individuals felt no reservation even when calling out each other's names. The reason was because they had become familiar enough that even their manner of speaking to each other had changed.

"Coming up next, I plan to visit another tribe...the Dragon Tusk Tribe."

"They are the tribe where strength means everything right? I heard that their fighting force was the strongest out of all the tribes."

“Erm, you are right. Seeing as the other side is a tribe of which we have never exchanged blows with before, we have to prepare ourselves mentally.”

All information on the other side was cast with a veil of mystery. Therefore, just heading towards the other side’s base was an extremely perilous matter. Furthermore, they had absorbed the survivors of the two exterminated tribes of the past war. This fact merely elevated the upcoming danger.

To the defeated from the two tribes, Zaryusu, who played an active role in the previous war was an absolutely hated enemy, detested to their very bones.

Even so, they were the most needed helping hand out of all the tribes for this war.

“If that is so…then, it is still better for me to go with you.”

“—What?”

“Is it so strange?”

The weed pile made a small movement, and let out a faint whispering noise. Because he could not see her face, he could not know what her intent was.

“I don’t mean to say that it is strange…but it would be very dangerous.”

“Is there still a place that is safe now?”

Zaryusu stayed silent. He was calmly thinking, bringing Crusch with him would be beneficial in many ways. However as a male Lizardman, he still had reservations against bringing a female Lizardman, whom he had feelings for, to a knowingly dangerous place.

“—I really am not calm enough.”

Although Crusch was hidden inside the grass, and her expression could not be seen, she almost seemed to smile slightly.

“...Then, let me ask you another question. What is with your appearance?”

“Does it not look nice?”

The question of whether it looked

nice or not was a strange one. However, wouldn't it be better to give a little compliment? Zaryusu did not know how to respond, and after a moment of deep thought, sized up the other's unseen expression and replied:

"...I should say that it looks good...right?"

"How can that be possible."

Crusch steadfastly rejected this. Zaryusu felt his strength drain from him, that couldn't be helped.

"It is solely because I am weak against sunlight, therefore when I head outside, I almost always dress like this."

"So that's why..."

“Ah, you haven’t given me your answer. Will you let me travel with you?”

Any further discussion on this would probably not sway her mind. From the point of view of forming an alliance, bringing her along should be advantageous for obtaining this objective. She also thought along the same lines, which was why she probably made this suggestion. With that being said, there was no reason to refuse her company.

“...I understand, then please lend me a helping hand, Crusch.”

Crusch was delighted from the bottom of her heart as she replied:

“—Understood, Zaryusu. Leave it to me.”

“Are you already prepared for departure?”

“Of course. My backpack is already filled with all the various necessary items.”

After hearing this, Zaryusu subtly assessed her back region and discovered that there was a slight lump on the surface of the grass. A fresh grass smell wafted from that area, as well as some concentrated fragrance. Since she was a forest druid, there should be some herbal-related skills, that was why the contents inside should be filled with related goods.

“Zaryusu, you look very tired.”

“Ah, yes, I am a bit. The past two days have been hectic, I’m lacking sleep.”

At this moment, a white scaled hand stretched outward from underneath the weed costume.

“For you. This is a strength-replenishing fruit. You eat it along with the skin.”

There was a purple fruit on the outstretched hand. Hesitantly, Zaryusu placed it in his mouth and gave it a bite.

His mouth was immediately filled with a sudden sharp and bitter taste, getting rid of a bit of tiredness. Certainly for raising

alertness, this effect was barely passable, but after continuously chewing it multiple times, suddenly a gush of taste exploded from the top of his tongue. Not only that, but even the breath he spat out had the same taste.

“Muu, what is with this cooling sensation that even permeates the nasal cavity?”

Zaryusu subconsciously shouted out his brother’s catch phrase. Seeing his reaction, Crusch could not resist chuckling.

“Do you feel that your drowsiness is slowly disappearing? The reality is that it has not actually vanished, please do not get overly familiar with this sensation. It is still better

that you find time to rest."

Zaryusu felt that his mind was clear and refreshed because of his inhaled and exhaled breaths, and because his entire body was filled with a cooling sensation. Feeling satisfied, Zaryusu nodded and replied:

"Then let us find some time and have a quick nap on Rororo."

Having said this, Zaryusu immediately climbed on top of Rororo's back, followed by Crusch likewise climbing upward. The unfamiliar feeling of having a weed pile laying against its body made Rororo unhappily glare at Zaryusu, but eventually thought of a method to reassure it.

“Then let’s be on our way. Because the ride will be bumpy, hold onto me.”

“Got it.”

Crusch hugged Zaryusu’s waist—the prickly feeling of the weeds gave Zaryusu a bit of an itch.

“……”

The difference in the actual feeling and what he had imagined it to be like, made the corners of Zaryusu’s lips curl.

“—What’s wrong?”

“No, nothing. Rororo, let’s depart.”

What was it that made her so jubilant? Crusch’s extremely merry

laughter came from behind him, making Zaryusu irresistibly reveal a wide smile on top of Rororo's back.

Part 2

The newly dominated Tove Forest was full of silence, every living being was afraid of the king's gaze and held their breaths.

But, only this place was different.

The sounds of trees being cut down and voices spread throughout the surroundings.

The golems here would make one think of heavy construction machinery—Heavy Iron Machines—were transporting wooden logs to a construction area of a huge

building. This building still had a long way to go before completion, the foundation was huge and only a small part was completed.

Working within this area were a group of golems and undead.

Out of the undead working here, most of them were Elder Liches, who wore conspicuous red robes.

Upon each one's shoulders were demons about 30 cm in length, sporting long bat wings and red copper-colored skin—demons known as imps. The imps lifted their venomous tails up high in order to prevent them from dripping poison and hindering the Elder Liches.

One particularly hardworking Elder Lich opened up the plans in his hands, and gave orders to the working golems.

Looking at the golems that stopped and obeyed his command, he compared the construction site and the plans in his hands. After a little consideration, he spoke to the imp sitting on his shoulder.

After listening, the imp expressed its understanding, flapped its wings and flew up into the sky.

With flying that could not be considered elegant, the imp surveyed the area with its eyes opened wide. Not long after, the imp found its target and quickly flew downward.

That person was the Great Tomb of Nazarick's 6th Floor Guardian, Aura Bella Fiore, and also one of the new kings of this forest.

The Dark Elf girl used a rolled-up paper as a megaphone, allowing her voice to travel far. The imp flew down and stood in salute in front of her, Aura then inquired in a familiar tone.

"Good~ now which group are you coming from?"

"Aura-sama, it would be Group U, Number 3."

"U Group, good good, understood. Now what else is the problem?"

The ones working here were divided into groups named with letters,

from A to U4, each group was sent to a different area to do a different job. From Aura's memory, she remembered that Group U's job was the construction of the storage warehouse, whose construction progress was also the second fastest.

"There are problems with the width of the logs used for construction, are we able to request for a little more ti—"

At this moment, the imp's voice suddenly stopped, this was because a sound came out from a piece of iron hanging around Aura's wrist.

"Its break time~"

Hearing a bubbly female voice, the

color of Aura's face suddenly changed, her ears dropped down and changed into an embarrassed expression.

"Yes, understood, Simmering Teapot-sama!"

Aura energetically replied to the voice from her wrist.

"So, because it is already time to eat, the work for this morning will end for now."

Out of all the monsters working in the area, almost all of them didn't need to eat. On that issue, Aura herself was also wearing the Ring of Sustenance, and needed neither food nor sleep. But since her own master worried about the well-

being of everyone and always said ‘Always have a good rest’, she followed his instruction happily.

“Although it would be rude to you, but it is time for rest, so please come back in an hour.”

“Understood, then this subordinate will take his leave.”

The imp quickly left and flew into the air, leaving only the sound of its flapping wings.

Looking at the imp going towards where the construction of the warehouse was taking place, Aura shook her shoulders, then looked at the strap on her wrist.

This time she showed an expression filled with happiness.

This was a reward given to her by her master because of all her hard work. Of course, towards their main task as a Floor Guardian, working hard at their job was a given, and did not warrant a reward. In fact, it should be obvious to give all that she had for the master.

However, she could not just reject the wristwatch given to her by her master.

“Hohoho, I really want to hear more of Simmering Teapot-sama’s voice.”

Aura warmly touched the strap on her wrist. Her current actions could be comparatively warmer than when she was touching her own pets.

All the voices that came from this instrument were from the one who created Aura.

Even though the voices were only used to tell the time, this still served to satisfy Aura greatly.

When she heard that her younger brother had received the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown, she felt a little envious, but honestly speaking, right now she felt that the object she obtained was so much better.

“Hohohohohohohoho.”

Aura’s ears drooped, and she looked shyly at the strap. She looked at the light shining brightly onto the strap and nodded her head, satisfied.

“Why did Ainz-sama set some times

when it cannot be used?”

Ainz-sama ordered that the times 7:21 and 19:19 could not be set as the alarm time.

“Eh...why don’t we just ask him? Ah, this is bad!”

Aura looked at the numbers on the strap and quickly ran off.

In front of where she was going was a maid.

One of the 41 maids within the Great Tomb of Nazarick, a homunculus whose outer appearance was that of a beautiful lady, but she was an exception.

Her head was that of a dog, with a vertical line running down the

center of her face like a scar with signs of stitching. It felt as though her face that had split into two halves were being sewn back together.

Her name is Pestunia S. Wanko.

She was the Great Tomb of Nazarick's Head Maid, and also a High Priest.

"As per Aura-sama's wishes, I have brought a hamburger, as well as two pickles, french fries with skin on, the drink would be cola... Wan5."

After a long pause, she let out a 'wan' sound, making Aura think that she might have just forgotten to add it at the end. But Aura did

not say anything special about this, because there was something else that had her attention. It was the smell which would make one's stomach growl. Although the Ring of Sustenance made it so that one did not have to consume food, it did not mean she could not eat. Also eating should be a fortunate thing, especially if it was food that was so delicious.

"Speaking of the overall effect of eating this..."

"Ah, no need, no need, I am not eating this for the sake of a beneficial effect."

"Understood."

Aura walked towars the side of

Pestunia, where a meal cart was emitting a fragrant smell.

“Time to eat, time to eat.”

Pestunia, upon hearing Aura’s self-composed meal song, took off the silver lid off the plate on the meal cart.

“Aah~”

Aura could not help but stare intently at the food revealed before her, at the same time spoke the words that immediately came to her mind.

“Although A7 beef is also good, but I much prefer a mixture of beef and pork. If only I could use that combination to create a 3-layered meat pie.”

“Then, this servant will convey your suggestion to the chef.”

“Ah sorry to trouble you!”

Aura then took the plate and happily walked away.

Part 3

Zaryusu observed the Dragon Tusk Tribe’s settlement before him. At the same time, a bundle of vegetation appeared from beside him. Needless to say, that bundle of vegetation was actually Crusch. She reached out her hand out to part the grass, revealing what Zaryusu thought was a beautiful face.

“Do you really wish to directly charge inside? Are you trying to

clash with them head-to-head?"

"Wrong, it is the opposite. The Dragon Tusk Tribe values strength heavily. If we were to casually part from Rororo and enter the place, we could quite possibly come across people picking a fight before we even meet with the Tribal Chief, and that would be troublesome. Proceeding forward while riding Rororo would deter that kind of situation from arising."

After riding Rororo forward for a distance, various warriors throughout the village must have seen them. Each one was holding weapon, watching Zaryusu's group with unwavering gazes.

Sensing hostile intent, Rororo let

out a low growl. Zaryusu listened to Rororo's warning and indicated for it to continue proceeding forward.

Continuing forward would eventually ignite into battle. Yet they kept proceeding forward until they had reached a threshold, a brink where anything could happen at any moment; before Zaryusu finally let Rororo stop and jumped down. Crusch also followed suit and was down in a moment.

Several warriors' sharp gazes were directed toward the two individuals. Those gazes carried such intensity that they were no longer simply hostile but outright murderous.

Crusch was slightly intimidated by their gazes which caused her to halt

her steps. Although she was an incredibly skilled individual amongst druids, she lacked experience of being on the front lines.

Conversely, Zaryusu took one more step forward. Using half his body to shield Crusch, he shouted out loudly:

"—I am the representative of the Green Claw Tribe, Zaryusu Shasha, and my visit here is to discuss matters with the Tribal Chief!"

His powerful bellowing voice seemed almost as if it would disperse the murderous intent around them. The Dragon Tusk Tribe warriors were all startled and seemed almost as if they were

intimidated.

Following this, Crusch also spoke up, announcing herself:

“I am the Red Eye Tribe’s acting Chief, Crusch Lulu, and likewise I have come to visit the Tribal Chief.”

Although her voice was not loud, it carried the pride and self-awareness of a tribe leader. The young and skinny female Lizardman from earlier was gone with the encouragement of the male’s self-confident voice.

“Once again, we are here to see the Tribal Chief! Where is he!”

At this moment, the atmosphere around them was rippling. It was just like the mood of the scene had

suddenly turned into actual attacking force directed at the two of them.

Each of Rororo's four heads did a somersault. Opening its jaws, it let out a threatening roar in all four directions as it shook its heads and glared angrily. As the gigantic Hydra's sharp growl emanated, fear seemed to permeate the surroundings as the atmosphere tensed up.

"...There was no need to protect me from something so trivial."

"I did not intend to protect you, because you came of your own volition. However, I am the one who allowed their entire tribe to perish, therefore it ought to have been only

myself to shoulder their hostile gazes."

Warriors started to gather at the interior of the tribe settlement. All of them were muscular and burly Lizardmen with light scars on their scales, suggesting that they were veterans of countless of battles. However Zaryusu perceived that the tribal chief was not amongst them.

Each of the Lizardmen were merely warriors. None of them carried authority like his older brother did, nor had a strange appearance with the confident atmosphere of being tribal chief like Crusch.

During this period when only Rororo was emitting an intimidated sound, each individual Lizardman

maintained a high level of alertness. At this moment—

“Haah!”

Crusch exhaled a breath of air, letting out a weak sound. However, Zaryusu, who predicted that there would eventually be one Lizardman making an entrance, remained unmoved. This was because even before the opponent had shown himself, he could feel that there was an enormously powerful being slowly getting closer.

But he still could not help staring dumbfounded at the Lizardman who appeared in front of him.

To simply put it, that Lizardman’s appearance was simply bizarre.

The opponent was an enormous individual with a body build exceeding 230 cm in height. This feature alone would be insufficient to justify calling it bizarre, therefore there were other reasons for describing the appearance as such.

Firstly, his right shoulder had a weird outer appearance being relatively thicker than the other, just like how fiddler crabs had a unilaterally giant claw on only one side. No, his left shoulder was not thin at all, with a thickness about the same as Zaryusu's own shoulder. It was simply his right shoulder which was abnormally thick, and this was not because of illness or congenital malformation, but was actual muscle.

His left arm's ring finger and pinky were completely gone.

His mouth was parted far backward, perhaps as a result of a cut wound, and his tail was squashed quite flat, not like a Lizardman's but rather more like a crocodile's.

However, even when compared to these, the most striking feature was —the insignia seared on his chest. Although it was a different image to the one on Zaryusu's chest, the meaning was the same, proving that this Lizardman was also a 'traveler'.

The Lizardman with the strange appearance sized up Zaryusu, and let out a terrible laughter as his teeth clashed together, sounding like collision between dead wood.

“Welcome, wielder of Frost Pain.”

His deep voice was extremely fitting for his appearance, except it had the effect of making even plain talk sound threatening.

“This is the first time we have met. I am the representative of the Green Claw Tribe, Zaryu—”

The Lizardman waved his hand indicating that introductions were not necessary.

“Just the name will do.”

“...I am Zaryusu Shasha, and this is Crusch Lulu.”

“That person cannot be...a plant monster? However, since you already bring a Hydra here, bringing

along a monster to be its food shouldn't be too much of a surprise."

"...That is not the case."

Towards Crusch who was about to shed her weed costume, the strange-looking Lizardman once again waved his hand to indicate that it was not necessary.

"Don't treat my joke for real, how troublesome."

"—!"

Feeling uninterested, the strange-looking Lizardman gave a brief glance at the bundle of weeds which was Crusch before once again turning his gaze towards Zaryusu.

“Then, why have you come?”

“Before that, would you please give us your name?”

“Ah. I am the Tribal Chief of the Dragon Tusk Tribe, Zenberu Gugu. Feel free to call me Zenberu.”

Zenberu revealed his teeth as he smiled. Although it was within expectations, the fact that a traveler was also the tribal chief still came across as startling news.

But then on the contrary, this was also the most acceptable answer. It was impossible that such a powerful male Lizardman was merely a traveler. In truth, at the moment he had appeared, the surrounding hostile intent had

immediately dispersed like smoke. This male Lizardman possessed such vast authority as well as having extraordinary combat prowess and cohesiveness.

“You may also call me simply as Zaryusu. Then, Zenberu, please let us know if there has been any unnatural monster which has visited your village recently.”

“Un, that Supreme One person.”

“Since the opponent has been here, the matter to discuss becomes much simpler—”

Zenberu raised his hand, interrupting Zaryusu’s speech.

“I can roughly guess what you plan to say. However, we only believe in

strength. Unsheathe your sword."

The burly Lizardman standing before Zaryusu—the Dragon Tusk tribal chief, Zenberu Gugu—smiled revealing a mouth full of teeth.

"What!"

Only Crusch exclaimed. Zaryusu and the surrounding warriors all showed expressions of agreement.

"...This method is simple, Dragon Tusk Tribal Chief. It keeps the judgment brief, and wastes no time at all."

"You truly are an outstanding emissary. No, since you are the master of Frost Pain, that should be a given, right?"

♦ ♦ ♦

Selecting the strongest as the tribal chief—for Lizardmen this was a natural and ordinary matter.

However, for a problem where the subsistence of the tribe was at stake, was such a simple method of determining an answer appropriate? Shouldn't this be a matter to be discussed and evaluated by everybody, taking detailed analyses from different approaches before arriving at a

conclusion?

Crush thought as such, then realized how coming up with this idea was incredulous.

In reality, all of the surrounding observing warriors, regardless if they were male or female, all agreed with the tribal chief's judgment. If it were before, she herself would also feel that this decision was one of the options.

'Then why does the current me feel doubt about this?'

Where did this doubt originate?

Did she think this way because she had suffered the magic attack of some stranger? Impossible. When it came to magic, she was confident

that she would not lose to anyone.

Crusch turned to look at the two individuals.

Zaryusu and Zenberu.

The two of them standing together looked like a child versus an adult.

Of course, body physique did not determine everything, and as a magic caster she understood this point fully. However, after seeing the difference in body build which was like that of heaven and earth, she could not help internally screaming out at herself that she did not wish for it to be like this.

'Do not wish? I hope that they do not—no, do I not wish for them to battle?'

Crusch wanted to comprehend why such a miraculous feeling would swell up inside of her. Why did she not wish for this to happen? Why did she not wish for them to fight each other?

There was only one answer which was obvious.

Crusch let out a slight smile. It was both a wry smile and also a self-mocking smile.

‘You can only honestly admit it now, Crusch. You don’t want Zaryusu to fight because you fear that he will be injured…fear that he may possibly die.’

Simply put, that was the concern.

In this kind of battle, only rarely

would it end with the death of one party. However, the meaning of 'rare' meant that there was still a possibility of it happening. If the fight escalated to one which involved a loss of reasoning, a life could be easily taken away. Born as a female Lizardman, she did not wish that her partner would lose his life because of his participation in this battle.

This also meant to say that in fact, subconsciously, Crusch had long already accepted Zaryusu's pledge of love.

'It is because no male in the past had treated me like he did...that was why I would so simply... If it's like this, does it mean that I am easily swooned? Eh, in the very least I

feel...a bit happy and also a bit saddened...ah, really, enough!'

Honestly accepting her feelings, Crusch walked to the side of Zaryusu who was preparing for battle, and gently tapped his shoulder.

"Are you missing anything in your preparations?"

"Nothing. There are no problems at all."

Once again Crusch tapped his shoulder.

His powerfully built shoulders.

From a young age, she had walked the path of a druid, and had come into physical contact with male

Lizardmen's bodies during prayers, anointment of medicine and when casting magic. However, it seemed like this time spent touching Zaryusu's body was even longer than those previous times aggregated.

'So this is Zaryusu's body...ah.'

When facing battle, hot blood flowing through the body inflated the powerful muscles allowing others to sense his masculinity.

"...What is it?"

Since Crusch had still had not let go, Zaryusu momentarily felt that this was strange.

"—Eh? Ah, that...this is a druid's blessing."

“This...will your ancestral spirits still assist me even though I am of a different tribe than Crusch?”

“My tribe’s ancestors are not so narrow-minded. Good luck.”

Crusch withdrew her hands from Zaryusu’s shoulders, and prayed in her heart for her ancestors’ forgiveness. This was because she had lied in order to wish for the man of her heart’s victory.

At the same time, Zenberu was undergoing similar preparations. In his right wrist he held an enormous spear—a metal spear with a length close to three meters, one which ordinary Lizardmen would need both arms in order to use.

Then he casually gave it a wave.

The lateral sweeping motion generated a gust of powerful wind, such that Crusch, who was a distance away from that sweeping motion, also felt it.

“Will victo...no, is everything alright?”

“About this... I will adapt to the situation as necessary.”

Crusch originally intended to ask whether it was possible for him to win, but she did not speak up. Zaryusu knew he was facing a battle where defeat was not an option.

Then this male Lizardman could not possibly lose. They had only

familiarized with each other over their half-day journey, and had only met since a day ago, but if anything Crusch understood one thing well.

This male Lizardman was worthy of being fancied by her.

“Then, are your preparations complete? Bearer of Frost Pain...ah, Zaryusu.”

“They are complete, and we can start anytime.”

Zaryusu cooly turned with his back facing Crusch, and walked into the perimeter of the duel zone.

Crusch exhaled a breath. The reason was that she could not resist gazing at the figure his back.

Crusch's hand was in contact for a very long time—actually it was not that long—and the warmth left on his shoulder was already slowly disappearing.

The upcoming battle would be simple, similar to the one used for determining the tribal chief. Because it was a one versus one fight, therefore the involvement of third parties by adding magic enhancement was a violation of the rules.

When the warmth was still on his shoulders, Zaryusu's mind was sent into disarray. While Crusch's hands had not left his shoulders, he almost thought that she had cast some defensive magic on him, but as her tribe's acting chief surely she

would not be oblivious to this rule.

Then, even when the other side had clearly not used enchantment magic, why did he currently feel so fired up inside?

Was it because he himself was a male, and wanted to put on a good performance in front of a female? His older brother once said that he was too dense...but this phrase seemed to be untrue now.

Zaryusu entered into the circle made up of Lizardmen and swiftly unsheathed Frost Pain. The sword responded to Zaryusu's command and gave off frosty white mist.

The surrounding Lizardmen burst into clamor.

They knew the previous wielders of Frost Pain, and were also survivors of the Sharp Edge Tribe, therefore would have personally recognized the prowess of Frost Pain.

Seeing the ability which only the true owner of Frost Pain could bring out, Zenberu's hideous facial expression turned into one of delight, revealing his teeth as he growled deeply, just like a wild beast would.

Toward the Lizardman in front of him blatantly giving off an eagerness to fight, Zaryusu only coldly threw out a sentence:

"I wouldn't want you to suffer serious injuries."

This provocative speech heightened the surrounding Lizardmen's antipathy to the maximum, however, the subsequent splash of water and sound of collision with the water surface brought about by extraordinary momentum silenced the surroundings.

That was the result of Zenberu stabbing the wetlands with his halberd.

"Oh...then let me taste defeat with satisfaction! Hear me well! If I were to die in this battle, he will be your tribal chief! There will be no objections to this!"

The surrounding warriors should have disagreed, but nobody voiced out an objection. In truth, if

Zaryusu really did kill Zenberu, everybody would give their obedience even if they had to bite their lips to do so.

“Very well, bring your resolve to kill me in this fight. I should be your toughest opponent to date.”

“Indeed...understood. Then, if I were to die by your hands—”

Zaryusu’s gaze slightly shifted backward towards Crusch.

“Of course, I will let your woman return home safely.”

“...Not ‘mine’ just yet.”

“Ho, looks like you really do wish to chase that weed monster. Is that female Lizardman that good?”

“Extremely so.”

Zaryusu ignored the female Lizardman squatting with her hands covering her face.

“That I really wish to see for myself. If I win, just before I let her go, why don’t I cut her open first.”

Up until then, Zaryusu had a warrior’s willingness to fight. Now another motivation to fight had surfaced.

“...It seems like I now have a reason for me to absolutely not lose. I will not let a fellow like you see Crusch’s face.”

“You really do like her to the point that no medicine can save you.”

“Yes, that is how much I like her.”

There were several female Lizardmen who spoke some words to the kneeling Crusch, and she immediately gave a denying response by shaking her head to signal them that they should just ignore those two for now.

“Ha!”

Zenberu delightedly laughed out loud.

“Then defeat me! If you were to pass away, it would all amount to nothing!”

“That was my intention all along.”

Zaryusu and Zenberu’s exchange of words concluded at this point and

they looked at each other.

“—I’m about to make my move.”

“—Bring it.”

Both Lizardmen exchanged brief words, but neither made any movement.

Just as the surrounding observing Lizardmen were starting to get restless, Zaryusu began to slowly draw closer. They were in the wetlands filled with water, yet no splashes could be heard.

Zenberu remained still as he waited.

Moments later, the moment when Zaryusu closed in—something flashed with a loud bang before the

eyes of Zaryusu as he leapt to the side. That was the sound made by Zenberu's halberd.

There was no technique involved; it was just a simple swing.

But that was why it was so shocking.

Zenberu took a stance with his halberd as he prepared to attack Zaryusu again. With just his right hand, Zenberu was able to wield that giant halberd. After each tornado-like swing, he was able to immediately resume his original stance.

Zaryusu was puzzled.

Therefore, in order to confirm the intention of these actions, he once

again jumped into the enemy's attack range—and was again greeted with another identical fierce horizontal swing. Zaryusu blocked with Frost Pain and a great impact landed on the hand he was holding Frost Pain with, and his body was knocked back.

To send a grown Lizardman flying with one arm, his arm power was indeed extraordinary.

—Blood boiled with excitement.

When the warriors saw their chief display unrivalled arm strength, they roared loudly.

Zaryusu swayed his tail to regain his balance as he retreated.

He shook his numb hand as he

squinted.

‘What…is this all about?’

Zaryusu focused on the giant body right before his eyes.

‘What is this? He is…too weak.’

Zenberu was quick as lighting, and would send Zaryusu flying if he blocked with his sword. But that was all, there was nothing scary about that.

Zenberu’s movements were akin to a kid playing with a stick: there was no technique to speak of, just powerful swings with brute force. But was that really all? With that giant arm of his, Zenberu should be able to wield it more skillfully than this.

‘Is he holding back to lure me off-guard?’

Zaryusu felt that wasn’t it.

Well being wary of this unknown strange feeling, he rethought his strategy. Zenberu who had yet to take a step asked with a smile:

“Well? You are not going to use Frost Pain’s ability?”

That sneer was probably a taunt and Zaryusu didn’t react to it.

“I was defeated by the wielder of Frost Pain in the past.”

Zaryusu remembered, he knew who Zenberu was referring to. That person was the chief of ‘Razor Edge’, the one who was killed by

Zaryusu.

Zaryusu eased his focus on Zenberu slightly and observed the surroundings.

Among the hostility he felt around him, the ones with the strongest killing intent should be the survivors from the Razor Edge.

“The two fingers on my hand are like this because of that fight.”

Zenberu showed his left hand which was missing two fingers to Zaryusu.

“If you use the power that guy unleashed to defeat me, you might be able to win.”

“Is that so?”

Zaryusu answered calmly.

Indeed, that ability was strong.

And becauses that ability could only be used thrice a day, he had a great chance of winning if he were to utilize that ability. Zaryusu only defeated the previous owner of Frost Pain because the ability had been used up. If he had used that ability, Zaryusu would probably had died.

But it was impossible for someone who knew the ability of Frost Pain to taunt him into using it.

Zaryusu tightened his guard.

'I don't understand... Anyway, things will never end if we drag on like this, I should attack.'

Zaryusu made up his mind and dashed in with twice the speed.

Zenberu swung his halberd at Zaryusu with an amazing speed.

Zaryusu didn't dodge and blocked it with Frost Pain. Everyone who saw this thought Zaryusu would be sent flying back.

Sword and halberd clashed—and the attack was parried easily.

There was no need to use abilities. Zenberu was merely wielding the halberd like a kid, and it could be parried no matter how hard he swung it.

Zenberu opened his eyes with shocked—no, it was admiration.

At the same time, Zaryusu charged toward Zenberu—giving him no time to withdraw the halberd to defend. Even if he had that kind of muscle, it would take time to pull the deflected halberd back. That was enough time for Zaryusu to close in.

The next instance, Frost Pain slashed towards Zenberu's body—

—Blood splashed out.

A loud cheer erupted and a soft cry could be heard.

The one who was bleeding and retreating wasn't Zenberu. It was Zaryusu who was bleeding from the two cuts on his face.

Contrary to his tactic so far,

Zenberu took large strides toward Zaryusu to attack with his weapon, not letting him get away.

That weapon was—claws.

Frost Pain and the claws clashed with a crisp metallic ring. After that, the sound of the halberd falling into the water could be heard.

“Wargghhh—!”

Zenberu breathed out deeply, and attacked consecutively with his large arm as he stepped forward.

Unlike the childish halberd play earlier, Zenberu’s attack with claws was on the level of a master. Zaryusu finally understood after the most important information was

leaked out.

Zenberu was not a warrior, but a monk who used his own body as a weapon by utilizing a special energy called Qi.

Zaryusu blocked the chop with Frost Pain.

The claws of Lizardmen were harder than humans, but not so tough that they could emit such a metallic noise. Indeed, this was the result of hardening the body parts—such as claws and fangs. An ability known as 「Natural Steel Weapon」, an ability of monks.

It was said that a punch of a monk that had reached the highest level could destroy the hardest material

adamantium. But judging from the feel of the exchanges, Zenberu wasn't at that level yet, he was at most at the level of steel. Even so, he was on par with one of the four treasures of the Lizardmen, Frost Pain, and that was not to be trifled with.

The two of them exchanged blows.

Zenberu attacked with his claws while Zaryusu slashed with Frost Pain. They evaded each other's attack and leapt back, pulling away from each other.

"—Hahah, you are still alive!"

Zenberu licked the blood and meat on his fingers.

Zaryusu used his long tongue to

lick the red liquid on his face.

Zaryusu felt lucky, for having avoided the claw to his eyes. He was hurt, but it was just a nick, he could still fight on. He was thankful to the ancestor's protection and—

'Maybe I dodged that because of Crusch's ancestors.'

Zaryusu was grateful while Zenberu complained unhappily.

"Speaking of which, you seem to be holding back by refusing to use that ability."

Zenberu clenched both fists and repeatedly beat his chest.

"My apologies, but I have no intention to use that move."

“Eh? Then don’t complain after your defeat that you did not use your full strength.”

“After exchanging blows with me, you still think I am the kind of person who would say such a thing?”

“...No, I don’t think so. Sorry, I have said too much. However—if you do not plan to use that move, then it’s my turn now!”

With the sound of piercing wind, Zenberu launched a kick toward Zaryusu with his leg that was as thick as a tree trunk.

The movement was made without a shred of hesitation.

As Zaryusu was avoiding that leg

thrust, he swung Frost Pain to slice Zenberu. However a metallic sound rang out and the sword was deflected.

Zaryusu widened his eyes in exclamation.

If one were to use a blade to block an attack by flesh, the attacking party would be the one to be injured, this much was common sense. However, utilizing a monk's Qi energy overturned this logic.

This was the effect of 「Steel Skin」. At the moment that an attack came into contact with the user's skin, this special ability would use Qi to envelop the body, turning skin into the toughness of steel. This ability was the same as

「Natural Steel Weapon」, where similarly the amount of training that was put into refining the technique meant that a greater toughness could be achieved.

The opponent's skin had deflected a magic sword. This meant that the opponent had already refined the monk ability to great heights. However, Zaryusu remained confident that victory was within his grasp.

It wasn't that the difference in both parties' battle techniques were astronomical, but rather that Zenberu's circumstances were inherently relatively unfavorable.

Allowing one to be overwhelmed by continuous attacks.

Kicks, tail sweeps, punches, chops, attacks of all sorts.

Zenberu relied on his body's ability with each strike, which was not only fast but also heavy. Facing such an enemy, even Zaryusu had to drop his offense to maintain his defense.

Continuous attacks were followed by even more continuous attacks.

If he were to forgo defending against the enemy's crushing attacks, Zaryusu would no doubt be defeated. The surrounding Lizardmen believed that the tribal chief who was launching continuous attacks without stopping had victory in his grasp and were shouting out

encouragement.

Zenberu's claws occasionally grazed Zaryusu, easily breaking apart the hard scales protecting the body, causing fresh blood to flow. His injuries were not light at all.

Zaryusu's body was full of these wounds. His life was like a candle in the wind, and it would not be surprising for him to surrender at any moment. The evidence was all over the Lizardmen's faces as they revealed joyful smiles in delight for their victorious tribal chief.

However, Zenberu did not share their sentiment.

Every time a continuous strike was blocked, Zenberu felt that victory

was slipping further and further away, which distressed him immensely.

The blade of Frost Pain harbored cold frost which stacked frost injuries for every cut it inflicted on enemies. In addition, it had an effect where any enemy coming into contact with the weapon would suffer some frost injuries. In other words, merely by exchanging contact between the blade and flesh, Zenberu was slowly being eroded by the frost.

With both hands frozen and both legs numb, his movements became more and more slower.

‘What a shame…because the previous fight was such a quick

defeat...I didn't even know that it originally had such an ability! It seems like it doesn't just have that one ability! No wonder it is one of the four treasures!'

It was precisely because Zaryusu knew that the item had such an effect that he chose to stick to defense—Rather, that was why he would choose this method as it was able to guarantee causing harm to the opponent. It was because of this that he did not evade Zenberu's attacks but took them head-on.

This choice was the most cautious and also an elaborate path to victory.

It was flawless. For the current Zenberu, it was the greatest enemy.

Toward Zaryusu who leaped over, Zenberu released a powerful punch. If this move were to be blocked, Zenberu's chances of winning would plummet.

Zenberu felt like he was picking a solo fight against an impregnable fortress.

'Ah, ah, what a shame, can I not defeat him... However, I have waited for this moment for a very long time!'

He recalled the memory of going by himself to pick a fight with that male Lizardman. Since then, he had become much stronger, and had gone through never-ending, back-breaking training in order to obtain victory. When he heard the news

that the person who had defeated him had been killed, he had felt immensurate regret, and yet he had not stopped his training.

All in preparation for this day to come.

As tribal chief, he had been unable to set everything aside to go pick a challenge, therefore when he heard that the wielder of Frost Pain had arrived in the village, he was hard-pressed to contain his joy.

He could not allow this fight, which he had been waiting for all this time, to end so easily.

Zenberu punched and kicked, yet his sense of touch was gradually diminishing, and his Qi too was

increasingly ineffective in reaching his hands and feet. Even so, he still attacked relentlessly.

‘So strong, even stronger than the fellow from that time!’

Seeing as he himself had trained unceasingly, this male Lizardman in front of him must have also undergone continuous training unabatingly up until this point.

Since the start, both Lizardmen had not drawn any closer during the fight, and of course he could also find an excuse by saying that he had lost to the ability of Frost Pain, but he did not wish to use such cowardly words.

‘Incredible! No wonder he is the

master of Frost Pain! The strongest male Lizardman amongst all Lizardmen!'

On the outside, Zenberu did not stop his continuous attacks, yet inside he was calmly complimenting Zaryusu who was using Frost Pain to block his moves.

Injuries, blood flow and more injuries.

Crusch, who was unwaveringly staring at this ferocious match, had already foresaw the outcome through her outstanding druid abilities.

'Truly an incredible insight...that he had already figured out the fight roughly just after it started.'

She took in a large surprise at Zaryusu's excellent capability as a warrior.

The surroundings ceaselessly emanated with sounds of encouragement.

Those cheering were directing their ardor toward the relentless attacker, at Zenberu who appeared to be completely prevailing against his opponent. The surrounding Lizardmen seemed oblivious to the fact that Zenberu's limbs were already slowing down in movement.

Zaryusu was strong. Crusch was confident in this conclusion.

Almost all of the Lizardmen relied on strong and robust bodies, using

brute strength to fight, but Zaryusu...no, even Zenberu as well...relied on technique to fight, and Frost Pain was merely a supporting asset.

As such, about this current situation...the gap between the two individuals and Frost Pain were largely related, but Crusch understood clearly that Frost Pain was not the sole factor in bringing about this outcome.

Hypothetically, if one were to give Frost Pain to an ordinary person to use, would that person be able to deal with Zenberu like this?

The answer was probably not. Zenberu was not such an easy opponent.

The weapon was indeed powerful, but Zaryusu who was able to beautifully utilize the the weapon's ability was likewise a first-class warrior.

But even more commendable than that was his sharp and insightful mind.

Zaryusu had been able to evade the opponent's strike when he had dropped the halberd because he was ever cautious and constantly observing the situation. He first observed the opponent for his trump card, and realized that the halberd was merely a bluff.

Having faced the tough decision of being branded a traveler, yet having the resolve to shoulder the

consequences, just what else and how much knowledge had he brought back during his travels apart from rearing fish and these battle tactics?

Without being aware of it, Crusch had already become firm in the belief that Zaryusu had victory in his grasp. Right now, her heart was beating rapidly not out of worry for him but for another reason as she gazed silently at that male Lizardman's face.

"He really is an outstanding male Lizardman."

The exciting battle mulled away everyone's time easily, but for the two who were fighting, it felt like a very long time. They were out of

breath and the physical and mental exhaustion was much greater than the time that was spent.

Zaryusu who retained his will to fight despite bleeding all over had commendable courage. He received high praise from the Lizardmen watching for keeping up with their chieftain far longer than anyone else could manage.

Suddenly, Zenberu who seemed to be inches away from victory dropped his battle stance.

The surrounding Lizardmen waited with bated breath for Zenberu to announce his victory when he shouted.

But the content was the opposite of

what they expected.

“It is my loss!”

Their chief should have been moments away from victory.

So why did the chief declare his loss? Only Crusch knew that this would happen. She ran briskly into the center of the circle formation.

“Are you alright?”

Zaryusu breathed out deeply when he heard that question. He lowered the sword in his hand and answered, exhausted:

“No mortal wounds... It won’t affect any future battles.”

“...Good, I will heal you with spells.”

Crusch made a rustling sound with her grass attire and revealed her face.

Zaryusu felt a soothing warmth over his wounds, different from the searing pain he suffered earlier. Zaryusu immersed himself in the sensation of energy flowing into his body and turned his head to face the giant Lizardman who fought a deadly duel with him.

Zenberu was surrounded by his tribesmen as he explained what exactly happened and what Zaryusu's tactic was.

"That should do."

After casting her spell twice, Crusch announced the treatment to

be complete. Zaryusu looked down at his own body.

There was still dried blood on his skin, but the wounds had healed completely. Zaryusu could still feel tightness when he flexed his wounds, but it doesn't seem like those would rip open.

"—Thank you."

"You are welcome."

Crusch smiled brilliantly, she looked beautiful showing her pearl-white teeth.

"—How pretty."

"Ah...!"

Her tail hit the water surface hard.

The two of them fell silent.

Crusch was silent because she was baffled by how casually this male Lizardman said these words. For Crusch who was not used to compliments, it was not good for her heart to hear Zaryusu say them too often.

On the other hand, Zaryusu didn't understand why Crusch didn't respond. Could he have made some mistake—such a feeling of unease flashed across his mind. Actually, he had always felt his life would have nothing to do with female Lizardmen, so he didn't knew what kind of reaction to make. Unexpectedly, Zaryusu was also at a loss.

As the two were troubled and wondering what to do, a voice saved them.

“Hey hey hey, you are too enviable you bastard.”

The two of them looked toward the one speaking—Zenberu.

Zenberu was dumbfounded momentarily when the two of them reacted the same way.

“Eh~ white one, can you heal me?”

Zenberu was unmoved even after seeing Crusch’s albino face. When Crusch recalled her impression after seeing Zenberu’s appearance for the first time, she understood Zenberu’s lack of reaction.

“Alright... But would it be a problem not to let your tribal druid to heal you?”

“Yeah, it doesn’t matter. Don’t talk so much, I’m hurting right now, even my bones are freezing, can you hurry up?”

“You are the one who want me to do this, remember to explain to your druids.”

“Yes, I am the one forcing you, so please.”

Crusch sighed and started her treatment.

Zaryusu felt the number of hostile gazes had fallen, and looks with good will had started popping up.

“Okay, I’m done.”

Crusch casted more healing spells on Zenberu compared to Zaryusu. This meant that his wounds were deep, although it didn’t show.

“Oh, your skill is better than the druids from my tribe.”

“Thank you, but I seldom do this for other tribes… No, thank you for your compliment.”

“Well, our injuries are mended, let’s go into the main topic for today okay? It is a bit too rush for you?”

“Oh! Let’s hear what you want to say—Although I wanted to tell you that…” Zenberu paused when he reached this point, and then said with a smile: “But let’s have a drink

first!”

Zaryusu and Crusch—the both of them looked puzzled, as if they didn’t understand what Zenberu was saying.

“Troublesome formal matters have to be discussed in a banquet, you understand?”

Letting the other party know your strength would give you the advantage in negotiations. Zaryusu understood that he had to risk his life for this as this was how Lizardmen did things. But he couldn’t understand the behavior of throwing a banquet since the Green Claw didn’t had such a custom.

It seemed depraved to party right

after a deadly battle.

“I don’t get it...”

A sense of resignation washed over Zaryusu, making him show his surprise honestly as he answered softly. But waves of regret appeared in his heart immediately, for he had shown such a childlike reaction to a tribal chief that had yet to ally with him. Zaryusu could also felt Crusch looking at him with a weird gaze.

For Zaryusu who had no experience with love, it was impossible for him to sense that Crusch was looking at him because the one she liked had displayed a new side. It was a look of curiosity adoring something cute.

“No, what I meant is that drinking

too much will dull the mind and that will be troubling for me."

Zaryusu changed his words in a panic, but Zenberu didn't seem to mind and replied:

"Hey hey hey, you are a traveler, right? If you want to learn knowledge around here, that would be the Dwarves right?"

"No, I didn't learn from the Dwarves, but from men living in the forest."

"Is that so? Then remember this, friends who drink together will become buddies, that is the teaching of the Dwarves. There might not be much time left, but we should start our talks soon. Am I

right, Zaryusu Shasa?”

“I see... I get it now, Zenberu Gugu.”

“Awesome! Everyone, we are having a banquet! Bring that here! Begin the preparations!”

♦ ♦ ♦

A fire pit almost two meters wide was set up on the ground, the flames almost searing the sky. Its red glow fended the darkness of the night away.

Near the fire pit was a giant pot more than a meter high and about 80 cm in diameter, the scent of alcohol lingered in the air.

Dozens of Lizardmen took turns to scoop the liquid from within. But the wine from the wine pot seemed to be bottomless.

Like Zaryusu's Frost Pain, this was one of the four treasures, 《Giant Pot of Wine》.

The taste of the never-ending wine was bland and would make anyone who appreciated alcohol frown. But for the Lizardmen, this was delicious wine.

That was why they kept coming back for more.

A short distance away from the wine pot was a very quiet place. As for why, it was because of the drunk Lizardmen lying motionless here.

The Lizardmen who had blacked out from the alcohol were all dumped here.

Crusch who had removed her grass attire treaded the ground carefully—although she stepped on the tail of a Lizardman unintentionally—as she moved forth. Her steps were steady and did not don't seem to be drunk, but she didn't seem to be completely fine either.

Her tail seemed to be moving independently, thrashing about lively. It curled at times, straightened the next. Erect this

moment, and drooped later, excited like a child.

In fact, Crusch felt as if a refreshing wind was blowing across her heart. Part of the reason was the alcohol, but the feeling of liberation also aided this.

This was the first time she showed her albino body to a large group of people. It surprised some of the people, but since their chief also looked like a mutant, she mixed in with the others in no time.

Crusch carried the food with both hands and walked with brisk steps.

She came to the place where Zaryusu and Zenberu were sitting cross-legged and drinking with each

other.

The two of them used something like a coconut as a cup. Inside was transparent fluid, but the whiff of alcohol was strong.

Raw fish was placed right before them to complement the wine. Zenberu greeted Crusch who walked over with a smile.

“Ah, plant monster.”

“...Can’t you change the way you address me?”

She already took that attire off, but this male Lizardman insisted on calling her that. He was probably planning to tease her like that forever. Crusch who realized this fact decided to stop her futile

resistance.

“Have you finished your discussion?”

Zaryusu and Zenberu glanced at each other and nodded.

“For the most part.”

They wanted to talk man-to-man, so they asked Crusch to give them some time alone. They already made it so clear, so she had no choice but to leave and collect the food, despite wanting to take part in their dialogue. If they wanted to discuss the upcoming battle, she would be involved too.

She wanted to know the essence of things while avoiding the awkward details—

“This is a talk between men.”

But Zenberu shut out the topic coldly with this phrase. Crusch showed her displeasure on her face honestly, and had no other option but to change the topic.

“So what are your plans? Form an alliance and fight together?”

“Huh? Oh, of course we will fight. Even if both of you had not come, we would still fight.”

The sound of wooden planks rubbing against each other came from Zenberu’s mouth.

“You are really a battle maniac.”

“Don’t praise me like that, I will get embarrassed.”

Zenberu ignored the stunned Crusch and requested something from her.

“Oh right, plant monster, can you help me convince him? No matter how I beg him, Zaryusu still wouldn’t become our tribal chief.”

Zaryusu also showed a resigned and fatigued expression. Crusch could tell from that tired look that when Crusch wasn’t around, this question had been repeated countless times.

“It is impossible for him to take this job. He is from a different tribe and is a—” Crusch wanted to say traveler, but she remembered that Zenberu was a traveler too, so she changed the topic: “Why did you became a traveler?”

“Huh? Oh, losing to the owner of Frost Pain was a huge blow to me, so it was only natural for me to want to leave and visit different places and become stronger right? So I became a traveler.”

Zaryusu who was beside him drooped his shoulders tiredly. Crusch remembered Zaryusu talking about his travels too.

When Zaryusu became a traveler, he was motivated by his determination, resolve and sense of duty to his tribe. Zenberu who was a traveler must had similar thoughts... But that wasn’t apparent from the way he was behaving.

Crusch placed her hand gently on Zaryusu’s shoulder to console him,

conveying to him the message that he was he, you were you.

To the bystander, Crusch's action must seemed like that of a lover. When she became aware of that, Crusch's tail started to panic. Zaryusu's tail was also thrashing intensely.

The two of them looked at each other's eyes and smiled shyly.

Zenberu pretended to not see all that and continued saying happily:

"I thought that there must be powerful guys in that mountain since it is so big, learned a lot from the Dwarf I met in my travels and got that war scythe. I didn't want it at first, but since he said that was a

momento of our meeting, I had no choice but to accept it."

"...So that happened, that's great."

Crusch answered coldly.

"Yeah, thanks."

—Sarcasm didn't work.

With the nice atmosphere ruined, Crusch picked up a cup and drank it all. She felt her throat heating up, a warmth spreading from the wine in her stomach to her entire body. Zaryusu did the same.

At this moment, the sound of a soft query came. The feeling was totally different than before, making it hard to discern who was asking immediately.

“So, do you think we can win?”

Zaryusu answered softly.

“...I don’t know.”

“Yeah, I guessed as much, there are no guarantees in war. If someone assured victory without knowing the strength of the adversaries, I would want to beat him up and ask him not to bullshit.”

Crusch didn’t say anything more to Zenberu who was laughing softly.

“But...our enemy is careless, this might affect our chance of winning.”

Crusch explained to the baffled Zenberu in Zaryusu’s stead.

“Do you remember what that monster said?”

“Sorry, I was napping then.”

“...Someone must have heard it right?”

“Hmmph, I forgot because it is a hassle. Anyway, the important thing is they attack us, we hit them back, right?”

This guy is hopeless—Crusch gave up explaining with such a face while Zaryusu explained with a wry smile.

“...They said, ‘Resist stubbornly, mortals’.”

A dangerous expression appeared on Zenberu’s face, his features

scowled into a sneer.

“How maddening, looking down on us from the very beginning.”

Zenberu roared angrily.

It hinted strongly of wrath and displeasure.

“That’s right, they are looking down on us. To be that confident…means they have the forces to overwhelm us easily… But we will crush the arrogance of our foes. We will unite the five tribes and show them the largest force we can assemble. We will strike them down head-on, and tell them we are not defenseless weaklings.”

“Hmmph, not bad, that’s a simple way of putting it. I like that.”

As the two male Lizardmen was discussing passionately on how to fight, Crusch poured cold water onto their plans.

“It won’t do us any good to wound their pride too much. We just need to show them our worth, correct? If they know we are of use, they might refrain from wiping us out.”

“Hey hey, you want us to bow our heads to those annoying people?”

“Zaryusu... I understand the danger in evacuating, but I think keeping our lives is more important than losing our freedom.”

Crusch said her piece softly.

The other two didn’t rebuke her thoughts or mock her about this.

No one wanted to be dominated, but being enslaved had more future than losing their lives. If they had a future, there would be endless possibilities.

For example, if they taught the fish farming technique to everyone, they might be able to abandon their current homes and run away.

If one was to give up on this possibility and order everyone to die, he had no right to be a leader.

“Listen to this.”

After hearing what Zaryusu said softly, the three of them perked up their ears and listened to the laughter from the banquet being carried here by the wind.

“We might not be able to have fun like this after being dominated.”

“Maybe we could, right?”

“Really? I don’t think so. I don’t think an existence that is amused by our death would be so charitable. If they had any mercy at all, they wouldn’t attempt to wipe us out with such a playful attitude.”

Crusch nodded in agreement.

Even so—

“What I want to say is...please don’t die.”

“—I won’t, not before I hear your answer to that question.”

“—!”

Crusch and Zaryusu gazed into each other eyes under the cool night sky.

And made an oath.

—Completely ignoring the disgruntled Zenberu.

Intermission

The conference room behind him should have started discussing a different topic.

But his work in that conference room was finished, so he had left.

Just his work of making reports was done though, he still had his job as the first seat of the Black Scripture, as the captain, to complete. It included reviving dead members, choosing temporary staff to fill the gap, training and experiments. As the Six Scriptures were a secret organization, he also had to live another life as a spy in the Theocracy.

And for his private life, he still needed to attend matchmaking sessions—under the premise of a polygamous marriage. There were only three awakened 'God-kin' in the Slane Theocracy, so the higher-ups had subtly requested him to ramp up his reproduction rate.

Such menial things kept piling up, depriving him of all his free time.

"I was hoping that they would give me some time to relax today."

After being liberated from the highest level conference in the Slane Theocracy—the Archbishop conference, he stretched his shoulders lightly—his eyes were drawn away by a clicking sound.

He knew who was making that sound before looking at that person. Only a very small number of people in the Slane Theocracy were allowed to enter this place so it was easy to identify that person at once from those who were absent during the conference.

As he had expected, a young girl was leaning against the wall.

She had a head of unique hair, with different colors on either side. One side was silvery white that lit up your eyes, while the other was so black that it seemed to devour everything. Her eyes were also different colors.

Beside the girl was a war scythe that looked like a pole arm.

She appeared to be less than fifteen years old, but her actual age was way beyond that. Ever since he became the captain of the Black Scripture—the first seat—her looks had not changed.

He moved his gaze toward her ears hidden by her hair—but he restrained himself.

The girl didn't like others looking at her ears.

The shiny lips of the girl became a crescent as if she was reading his mind.

She was an interracial child born from almost impossible odds, the strongest special seat within the Black Scripture, 'Certain Death'.

Her job was to protect the sanctuary where the five holy equipment were laid.

The sound came from a toy in the girl's hands called a Rubik's Cube, made popular by the Six Holy Gods. While she was producing the clicking sounds, the girl said:

"It's quite easy to get one side, but it's really hard to get two, right?"

It was simple for him, but he wasn't sure if he should answer honestly, so he responded with a wry smile. The girl didn't seem interested in the answer anyway and continued asking:

"What happened? Why did all the Archbishops gather?"

“The report should have been delivered to you.”

“Didn’t read.”

She answered curtly.

“It’s faster to ask someone about it. Was the prophecy of ‘Thousand Miles Astrologer’ wrong? The mission to defeat the Catastrophic Dragon Lord...something happened to them right?”

Their eyes did not meet throughout the conversation as the girl kept looking at the toy in her hands.

“...They fought a mysterious undead and retreated after two deaths and one heavily wounded.”

“Who died?”

There was no emotion of sadness for the death of someone from the same side. Her attitude was similar to asking about something unrelated to her, and he wasn't bothered by this. This attitude fit right in with the style of this girl.

"The bodyguard of Kaire-sama, Cedran, and Beaumarchais who attempted to capture the vampire who appeared to be still."

"So it's 'Thousand Wall Shield' and 'Divine Chain'. The 'Earth Miko Princess' died from a mysterious explosion recently, and the Black Scripture lost two more good men...what a disaster. Who is the heavily injured?"

"It's Kaire-sama. Some curse

seemed to prevent healing magic from mending her wounds, so she retreated."

"And the vampire?"

"Left alone. When we tried to approach or capture it, the vampire counterattacked. So our people decided to leave it alone in that place."

"Isn't that just avoiding the problem?"

"...It was decided during the conference to maintain the status quo."

That was the conclusion made earlier in the conference room.

Instead of suffering major losses

from attacking, it was better to let it be before gathering their forces. Anyway, the other nations wouldn't be able to defeat that undead anyway. If someone like that turned up, that meant someone they had to be wary of appeared, and they had to tighten their national defenses first—In the end, they came to a consensus to leave a bare minimum team and withdraw everyone.

He agreed with this decision.

Only someone on the level of a 'God-kin' or Dragon Lord could defeat that vampire in a straight-out fight. It would be wiser to leave a team behind and watch out for the one that could defeat that vampire.

“Hmm, that wasn’t a vampire, right?”

He agreed with that too, that was why he said it was a mysterious undead.

“Could it be a Dragon Lord? Vampiric Dragon Lord or Elder Coffin Dragon Lord?”

The curve of her lips grew steeper into an obvious smile. It was if that expression of blood lust could be called a smile.

“...Weren’t these two dragons destroyed?”

He replied as the atmosphere turned awkward, but got an immediate answer:

“Both of them are undead Dragon Lords, it’s hard to say if they are truly dead.”

The girl lifted her head for the first time and looked straight at him. There was a glimmer in her different colored eyes, filled with curiosity, joy and the urge to fight.

“Between the vampire and me, who do you think is stronger?”

He replied to the question he was expecting with a prepared answer.

“Of course it’s you.”

“Is that so...”

She seemed to lose interest and stared at the toy again.

He sighed in relief.

“What a pity, I thought I had a chance to taste defeat.”

As he listened to the mumble of the girl, he wondered: ‘Who would win if the two of them really fought?’

He fought the girl and the vampire before. While the vampire felt stronger, but there was no way the vampire could win against ‘Certain Death’.

Their equipment was on a different scale.

That vampire seemed to be unarmed, which was the weak point of powerful monsters. They were too confident of their strength, so they didn’t wear powerful gear.

On the other hand, the girl was equipped with the relics of the Six Gods, so he judged her to be stronger. What if both sides had equipment of the same level?

Impossible.

He dismissed the question immediately. It was impossible to find and obtain equipment that could rival the girl's godly equipment.

But what if the vampire found them?

In that case... Maybe the strongest undefeated special seat of the Slane Theocracy would know failure. And it would be the time to despair with the defeat of the guardian of

mankind.

No, why did he need to assume the girl would fight alone?

He wasn't at her level, but he was an awakened God-kin and had many items at their disposal. If they used these items, they could defeat that vampire if there was only one. There was no way for so many undead that strong to exist.

He heard laughing while lost in thought, and looked at the source with a frown.

"Let's talk about something else, when are you getting married?"

This was an undetermined agenda that surfaced during the earlier meeting. She meant when he was

going to get a girlfriend—to put it nicely, a wife, to say it nastily, a tool to make babies.

“There’s no one yet.”

“Well, you are still young.”

When the Black Scripture members went on a mission, they would wear magical masks to conjure a fake face.

By the laws dictated by their God, someone over the age of twenty would be considered an adult in the Slane Theocracy. He was a lot younger than twenty when he took off his mask.

“After the marriage, your partner will be detained within the Theocracy…but don’t worry, she can

still raise a child."

"I know that, I'm also a member of the Scripture."

"That's true. Ah, it would be better to tell your prospective wife that you need to marry multiple wives. There is no problem in the eyes of the law, but there are people who dislike polygamy despite being educated that way."

With permission granted by the Theocracy, it was possible for a man to marry many wives. It was an archaic practice to protect the bloodline of the few powerful men in the past. But the norm was monogamy, with just a handful of successful applications for polygamy a year. Even when

successful, they were limited to just two wives.

“Thank you for your kind reminder, what about you... You don’t plan to get married?”

He asked because she was much older than she looked.

“Well, if there is a man who can defeat me, we could get married. Even if he is ugly and had a twisted personality... It doesn’t even matter if he is not human if that man could defeat me. How strong would our child be?”

The girl place her hand on her abdomen and smiled for the first time today. He was sure this answer meant the girl didn’t plan on ever

marrying.

But how would things change if an existence that could defeat that vampire appeared?

A sense of uneasiness clouded his heart.

Chapter 3: Army of Death

Part 1

“Oh, I can see it.”

Zenberu who was seated at the very back of Rororo looked to the front and smiled.

They could see the tribe that was designated as the first to be destroyed several hundred meters ahead—the Razor Tail Tribe. Their size was about the same as the Green Claw, but the number of Lizardmen was much larger. This was probably because Lizardmen from the other tribes had also gathered here. They were in the preparation for battle and everyone seemed to be busy.

“What an irresistible atmosphere.”

Zenberu made a loud breathing sound, smelling the taste in the air. It was a scent that made one hot-

blooded, but Crusch who probably hadn't smelled something like this before thought differently.

"Isn't it dangerous for us to ride in on this child?"

They could feel the high tension from such a great distance, which made Crusch who was dressed like a vegetative monster voice her uneasiness. She was afraid that the Hydra would draw the wrath of the bloodthirsty Lizardmen.

The other party probably knew about Zaryusu, but they might not have seen Crusch or Zenberu before. And not all the Razor Tail tribesmen knew about Zaryusu either.

“Wrong, the opposite is true. We won’t be in danger if we ride towards them on Rororo.”

She had a baffled look, it wasn’t visible, but that was the feeling Crusch gave. Zaryusu made a simple explanation.

“My older brother should have arrived, and he definitely would have told them that I would be riding on Rororo. News of us coming on Rororo should have been reported to my older brother, so we just need to approach slowly.”

After they advanced on Rororo for a while, a black-scaled Lizardman came out from the village. Zaryusu waved at that familiar Lizardman.

“That’s my brother.”

“Heh.”

“Ho.”

They responded in unison, Crusch was simply curious whereas Zenberu felt like a beast who found a strong opponent.

As Rororo closed the distance between Zaryusu and Shasuryu, they were finally close enough to make out each other’s faces. The two brothers stared at each other.

The two of them were only apart for two days, but because they had already steeled themselves to the fact they might not meet again, their emotions were really strong.

“It’s great that you returned, Younger Brother!”

“Ah, I bring good tidings, Elder Brother!”

Shasuryu shifted his gaze to the two behind Zaryusu. Zaryusu could feel the hands of Crusch that was hugging on to him stiffen from nervousness.

As they closed the gap completely, Rororo came before Shasuryu and stretched its neck toward him affectionately.

“Sorry, I didn’t bring any food with me.”

The moment Rororo heard this, it withdrew its four heads as if it was throwing a tantrum. The Hydra

couldn't understand the language of the Lizardmen, but it could tell what Shasuryu was saying through their understanding similar to that of family members. Or it simply didn't detect the scent of food from Shasuryu.

"Well then, let's dismount."

Zaryusu said to the two behind him and agilely leapt off Rororo. He then grabbed Crusch's hand and assisted her in getting down. Shasuryu looked at Crusch in surprise.

"What is that plant monster?"

Getting this sort of reaction made Crusch a little depressed, but she didn't retort. This was probably

thanks to Zenberu's constant teasing. But the next stunning blow made her stiffen.

"She is the female I like."

"...Ohh."

Shasuryu sighed. He then stared at the stiff Crusch who was still holding hands with Zaryusu.

"Muu... I just want to ask one thing, is she a beauty?"

"Yeah, I am thinking of marrying– Eh!"

The sharp pain coming from his hand made Zaryusu shut up, because the one he was holding hands with was poking him with her claw. She didn't hold back at all.

Shasuryu looked at the two of them with displeasure.

“I see... So you are picky about the appearance... And you kept playing cool, saying ‘I can’t marry’. You just haven’t met the right one yet... Alright, back on topic, I am the Chief of the Green Claw Tribe, Shasuryu Shasha. Thank you for agreeing to ally with us.”

Shasuryu wasn’t trying to confirm this fact, but was absolutely sure of it. But Zenberu and Crusch wouldn’t be shaken up because of this small matter.

“We should be the one thanking you. I am the acting Chief of the Red Eye Tribe, Crusch Lulu.”

Everyone thought that Zenberu would introduce himself after Crusch finished her greeting, but that didn't happen. Zenberu was sizing up Shasuryu without hesitation.

Satisfied, Zenberu nodded and spoke with a feral expression.

"So you are the one, the warrior who could utilize the power of the druids, I have heard about you."

"I am surprised that even the Dragon Tusk knew about this."

Shasuryu replied as the two of them stared at each other like a couple of wild beasts.

"I am Zenberu Gugu, Chief of the Dragon Tusk Tribe, until the day

your brother agrees to take over."

"Thank you for coming. You are indeed worthy to be the chief of the tribe which values strength over everything, I welcome you."

"So, want to have a match? Shouldn't we find out who is stronger?"

"...That's a great idea."

Zaryusu didn't want to intervene. Finding out who was stronger now would definitely make things easier in the future.

But Shasuryu raised a hand, diminishing Zenberu's urge to fight.

"—I agree with you, but this an awkward timing."

“Why is that?”

Shasuryu smiled at Zenberu’s unhappy face.

“...The scouts we sent out are about to return, we should be able to obtain detailed intelligence about the enemy. We can fight after hearing their reports, right?”

♦ ♦ ♦

A small house was used as the conference room of the chiefs.

The chiefs of the gathered tribes and Zaryusu were gathered here, a total of six.

Zaryusu, the one who killed the previous Razer Edge Chief and bearer of Frost Pain, was famous and all the chiefs knew of him. He was also the brave one who convinced Red Eye and Dragon Tusk to join the alliance, so no one was opposed to him taking part in the conference.

In the small house, the six sat in a circle. When the other three chieftains saw Crusch's white scales, they were surprised, but had already regained their composure.

After finishing their greetings, the first who spoke was the chief of the

Small Fang.

He was petite compared to other Lizardmen, but his limbs were as strong as steel. Originally from the hunter group, his ranged attack skills were the best among all Lizardmen in the vicinity of this lake. In fact, during the fight to decide the position of chieftain, he settled each of his matches with just one precise rock throw.

In order to determine the position of the enemy troops, he mobilized all the hunters to reconnoiter.

“The enemy numbers nearly five thousand.”

This number exceeded the total population of all Lizardmen, but

was still within expectation. Some even sighed in relief when they learnt of this number.

“...And the leader of the enemy?”

“I can’t say for sure, there are monsters that looked like giant masses of red meat in the middle, but it’s too difficult to get in close.”

“What about the make-up of the army?”

“An army of undead, mainly skeletons and zombies.”

“The undead of Lizardmen?”

“No, they are not Lizardmen. I don’t really know about the creatures living on land, so I can’t be certain. But it should be human types, I

didn't see any tails either."

When Zaryusu heard that, he was sure that they were the race living on the plains, humans.

"Can we launch a surprise preemptive attack?"

"That would be difficult, the other party is using an open space cleared out from a corner of the forest. How long did they take to clear the trees? It is strange that the felled trees are nowhere to be found—Ah, I digress. Anyway, they are in the forest. Leaving whether we can succeed aside, it would be very hard to bring warriors along."

"What about a sneak attack with just the hunters?"

“Spare us, Crusch-san. There are roughly 25 hunters, how could we defeat the undead army of 5,000? We will just get wiped out.”

“Hmm… What about using the power of the druids?”

Several of them nodded in agreement to Shasuryu’s suggestion and their eyes fell on Crusch. But the one answering was Zaryusu.

“No, let’s not do that.”

“Ah? Why?”

“The other party has kept their words so far, but they won’t do so if we attack them.”

“Indeed. We should avoid initiating the attack before we gather all the

tribesmen.”

“So we will prepare for a defensive battle?”

“Defend, hard.”

The Lizardman who spoke with a strong slur was the chieftain of the Razor Tail.

He was covered in white armor that was shining in a different manner from metal.

The armor was emitting a soft magical gleam. That was one of the four treasures of the Lizardmen, White Dragon Bone.

It was a set of armor made from the bones of a Frost Dragon that had resided in the Azellerisia Mountain.

Armor made from bones—even that of a powerful dragon—would not be imbued with magic. But that set of armor was enchanted with magic without anyone knowing when.

The problem was that the magic could possibly originate from a curse.

This was because the White Dragon Bone converted intelligence into defensive power. If an intelligent Lizardman wore it, it would turn harder than steel, matching mithril and even the legendary adamantium.

But even if you removed the armor, the intelligence would not recover. That was why there were some who said this magic was actually a curse.

Among the Lizardmen, he was widely known for his intelligence. After wearing this armor, the defense of the armor was strong enough to deflect all the weapons of the Lizardmen, even one of the four treasures, Frost Pain. It was probably as strong as adamantium.

And normally, those who donned the armor would lose all intelligence and appeared to be brain damaged. But he was still able to think, proving how high his original intelligence was. Hence, the Razor Tail had never decided the position of chieftain through physical combat after his birth.

“Here, swamp, weak foundation, wall...easy break down.”

“I see, so we should initiate the attack?”

“Yeah, why not, attacking is better than defending, each of us just needs to take down three to four foes right? We just need to defeat them, piece of cake.”

The others in the conference looked at each other after hearing what Zenberu said. In the end, Crusch changed the topic.

“The problem is enemy reinforcements… They might be gathering their forces.”

“Hmm… That is hard to say. From the size of the open space, they can’t fit in any more undead… Though they just need to place

them inside the forest."

The undead don't need food, rest or large open space to set up camp. It would be hard to gauge their numbers from the size of the area.

"To play it safe, we need to consider a defensive strategy."

"Well then, we the Red Eye will take care of strengthening the walls for a defensive fight. I hope everyone could provide help."

The other chieftains nodded in agreement, even the depressed Zenberu did so.

"In short, we need to prepare our defenses and set up a command structure."

“First of all, we should leave the druids to Crusch, their command would be left in your hands.”

Amidst the agreement of everyone present, one person raised his objection.

“The chieftains should form a special team.”

The gaze of everyone fell on Zaryusu who had spoken.

“I see... So that’s how it is, Brother.”

“You are saying we should form an elite team?”

“That’s right. The enemy outnumbers us, if we don’t take out their commander, we might lose. If the monster that visited all the

villages shows up, we can't win by numbers, and have to destroy them with a small group of elites."

"Wouldn't our forces be leaderless then?"

"From the warriors...choose...choose leader...will do."

"Even if there is no commander, they just need to charge the enemy right..."

"...The special team will command from the back, and will only move out if we discover the enemy commander or if the battle is not going well. Is that okay?"

"That should be fine. Well then, including Zaryusu, how about the

six of us forming one team?"

"No, we should form two teams of three."

Splitting up meant they could fight on two fronts, but their force would be spread out and weakened.

"One team will attack the enemy commander, the other will be in charge of the defense."

"Well then, we three chieftains will form a team, Zaryusu and the two chieftains you brought over will form another, that should be the best way to divide ourselves. The mission of the teams should be to react to the situation."

"Yes, that is great. Any problems, Zaryusu?"

“I understand. Any objections, Zenberu, Crusch?”

“I have no objections.”

“Me too. It’s a pity I can’t fight as I please, but I will follow the will of the victor.”

“Well then, there are still four days before they attack us, right?”

“Correct.”

“Is there anything we need to prepare for?”

“We need to stock up on throwing stones and strengthen the walls. Also, we need to interact with the other tribes and set up a chain of command, ensuring that all of the tribes can function as one.”

“As for the allocation of work, we, the Small Fang Tribe wish to leave that to Shasuryu like before.”

“We…okay with that…what about…you two?”

Crusch and Zenberu nodded in agreement too.

“Then I will take over the command. Next, we will decide the details of all the work we need to do in the next three days.”

♦ ♦ ♦

After the work for the day was done, Zaryusu walked silently in the noisy and lively village. Several Lizardmen greeted him with respect when they saw Zaryusu's mark on his chest and Frost Pain at his waist.

It was a bit irritating, but in order to raise morale, he had to answer them. Zaryusu thus answered them with a serious, proper and confident expression.

Zaryusu maintained this attitude as he headed to the outer walls of the village. They were rushing to construct walls over there, many Lizardmen were concentrating on their work.

First, they bound the stakes that were some distance apart with vines. Mud with low water content was then smeared on. The druids then casted some magic to remove the moisture, and the wall was complete. There were some cracks on it, probably because not all the water had evaporated. They then repeated the same steps in another place.

“Ara, what is it, Zaryusu?”

“Nothing, just wondering what you were doing.”

Walking with splattering noises in the wetland, Zaryusu made his way to Crusch who was dressed like a vegetative monster and pointed at the work that was being repeated in

front of them.

“What is that?”

“Mud wall. We don’t know what type of enemy will be coming, but I wanted to make it hard for them to move in... But there is no time, we are not even half done.”

“Is that so... But isn’t it easy to destroy things made from mud?”

“No problem. If the mud is thin, it is easy to break it. But thickening it will make it tougher. Because this is a rushed job, and there’s shortage of sufficient materials and it will weaken if it rains. But it won’t break down so easily.”

‘That is true, no matter what material it is, it would be hard to

destroy if it was thick enough.'

In front of Zaryusu who was thinking about that, dozens of Lizardmen were working as fast as they could, but progress was as slow as a tortoise. Even if they worked on it for three days, it wouldn't be much wider. But it was better than nothing.

"For now, the parts the wall couldn't reach would be covered by fences that would be hard to tear down."

In the direction Crusch was pointing at—

The stakes over there were pulled out and planted some distance away, forming a triangle with the

two other stakes beside it. Between the stakes were vines loosely bounded together, forming ropes blocking the passage between them. Zaryusu thought for a moment, and recalled that the fence around the Red Eye Tribe looked like that too.

“What is that?”

“By placing something heavy there, the fence won’t fall even if it were being pushed or pulled. As for the ropes, they are meant to prevent the enemy from getting through. If the ropes are pulled taut, it would be easily cut by swords or knives, that’s why we left some slack on it.”

Crusch answered Zaryusu’s questions excitedly.

During their short journey, Zaryusu was always the one teaching her. Being able to teach something to Zaryusu made her happy. Apart from this, there was another feeling involved.

“I see...it is harder to destroy it that way.”

These impressed words made Crusch felt proud.

Zaryusu nodded deeply.

The plan to turn the village into a stronghold was progressing steadily. It couldn’t match up to the defensive structures of humans and Dwarves, but for the wetlands that were hard to traverse on, there was no better way.

“By the way, Zaryusu, did you tell the warriors—”

As Crusch was saying that, the cheers of the warriors were carried by the wind into their ears. It was an intense and hot-blooded noise.

“What is happening? This sounds familiar... I know! These are the cheers when you guys battle. Could it be a duel between your brother and Zenberu?”

Zaryusu nodded and noticed that Crusch looked worried.

“...As the commander-in-chief, wouldn’t it be troublesome if your brother loses?”

“I don’t know, but my elder brother is strong. If he had the chance to

use his druid powers, he will become even stronger, even I might lose to him."

Shasuryu who casted several buffs on himself was very strong. He would probably refrain from using offensive spells in a mock battle, but if he did, Zaryusu wouldn't be a match without Frost Pain.

The reason why the original owner of Frost Pain didn't use its special ability that could only be used thrice in one day against Zaryusu was because he had used it up during his fight against Shasuryu.

"That's great..."

Zaryusu was wondering whether he should show Crusch how strong his

brother was in a fight, but he remembered something else that had been worrying him.

He hesitated, but decided to voice it out in the end.

It was despicable to say this after all the plans had been set in place. But he couldn't hide this from the one he liked, that was how pure and strong he felt about Crusch.

"I am worried about one thing—"

Hearing Zaryusu's anxious voice, Crusch smiled. It was a deliberate smile, something that was not her style—an expression that didn't fit the situation—stopping Zaryusu from continuing. The one who spoke in place of Zaryusu was

Crusch.

“—You mean that thing you didn’t bring up during the conference right? If the enemy already anticipated this, and was waiting for us to form an alliance.”

Zaryusu fell silent, she was right.

The other party gave them time, announced the order of attack deliberately and didn’t get in the way of Zaryusu’s efforts to form an alliance. What if their plan all along was to gather all the Lizardmen in order to annihilate them.

“I have many worries, someone who thinks as deeply as you should feel even more so. But no matter what, we will fight this battle with our

foes... We can think about the other things after that."

"They won't give up even if we win. The chance of them giving up is abysmal."

"That might be so, but what you said that night is true. Look—"

Crusch extended her arms toward the empty space before her. But Zaryusu understood that she was referring to the entire village.

"Look at all the Lizardmen from the various tribes working towards the same goal."

Indeed, the Lizardmen from all the tribes were advancing together as one.

The image of the five-tribe banquet surfaced in Zaryusu's mind. The tribes were interacting harmoniously together without reservation. It would be a lie to say the survivors from the two destroyed tribes bore no grudges. But they displayed the will to swallow their grudge in the face of this incident.

The irony.

Zaryusu muttered. He always thought their divided worlds would carry on forever, he never thought the appearance of a mutual enemy would allow him to witness the unity of the Lizardmen.

"We need to protect the possibility of our future, Zaryusu. The alliance

of all the tribes would promote our development."

Building walls with mud was a technique Zaryusu had never seen before. But now, the other tribes knew about this technique. In the future, all the Lizardmen tribes would build such walls. With such strong walls, it should be able to keep the monsters from breaking in. That way, the chances of the weak young ones being attacked would fall, and the number of Lizardmen would increase.

They could meet the increase in demand for food by using Zaryusu's fish-breeding farm.

Maybe in the near future, all Lizardmen would unite into one

giant tribe in these swamps.

“Let us obtain victory, Zaryusu. It is impossible for us to know what happens in the future, maybe everything would be over after this battle. If that is so, we can start developing a wonderful world without food problems and the need for Lizardmen to kill each other.”

Crusch smiled. Zaryusu suppressed his emotions, if he allowed his feelings to run loose, he might not be able to reign them in; but he had something he had to say.

“You are an excellent female Lizardman—After this battle is over, please tell me the answer to that question I asked when we first

met.”

Crusch smile became even more brilliant.

“I understand, Zaryusu. I will tell you my answer after this is all over —”

♦ ♦ ♦

Demiurge was in a great mood as he hummed while he worked.

He picked up the polished bone,

wondering where he should put it for the best presentation. Shortly after, he made his decision and sliced off the tip and place it within the item he was building.

The bone fitted in perfectly like a piece of a puzzle.

If building a house without using nails was known as ‘precision wood joint’, then what Demiurge was doing should be ‘precision bone joint’.

“That looks great.”

Demiurge caressed the bone with a smile on his face. If he continued to work on it, he had a feeling he could complete an outstanding piece.

“But...I am lacking the right femur of a man about 1.2 m in height.”

He could complete it even if he don’t find that bone. But without it, it wouldn’t look as nice.

Usually, Demiurge would compromise and make do with this. But this gift was meant for his beloved master, so he had to make it perfect.

“It would be great if I can find something suitable.”

Demiurge, who was in a good mood, started moving.

Actually, Demiurge liked to create such items. His interest was not in using bones to make items, but in carpentry work. His interest in this

field was rather wide, from art pieces to furniture, his skills had surpassed that of a weekend hobbyist.

In fact, if you ignore the material he was using, anyone would be impressed by the quality of his work.

The other items displayed in this tent, such as the bronze bust of the master cast from lava, all sorts of chairs and clamps were all made by Demiurge. They might be for practical use and lack decorations, but they were all excellent pieces.

As Demiurge was studying a material he picked up from a corner of the tent, he felt some movement near the entrance.

Demiurge put the bone in his hands back gently and held the item bestowed onto him by his master that might not be replaceable, focusing on what was happening outside. Normally, the one outside should be his underling or comrade. No one could have broken through all three layers of Demiurge's defenses without him noticing, but he had to be wary of the one who had controlled Shalltear.

Several seconds later, someone opened the entrance of the tent. He was dressed in pure white, wearing a mask with a long beak like a bird.

Peruchinera.

He was a clown, a creation of the Supreme Rulers just like Demiurge.

For this operation, he had been assigned to assist Demiurge.

Confirming that he was not under mind control, the tension in Demiurge's eyes dispersed and he relaxed the grip on the item in his hand.

"Demiurge-sama, the skin has been peeled."

These words made Demiurge felt a bit of pity.

Demiurge wanted to enjoy this work himself, but in order to guard against the mysterious enemies, he couldn't leave his post most of the time and had to assign the task to Peruchinera.

Demiurge did not express his

emotions and gave new instructions to Peruchinera.

“Good work. Well then, begin the next phase. It would be disrespectful if we give that thing to Ainz-sama like this.”

Demiurge asked Peruchinera who was bowing gracefully.

“So, how many died?”

“None. Thanks to the torturer, they only lost consciousness, therefore we can continue peeling their skin soon. A few were unwilling to be healed... but that was within expectations, so there is no issue.”

“That is splendid.”

It took a lot of effort to collect the

materials, they had to peel a few more times for it to be worthwhile. That might be so, but he didn't want to peel the skin in a painless fashion or drug them.

"I want everyone to be happy."

Peruchinera said suddenly, making Demiurge remember his personality.

Peruchinera was known throughout Nazarick for his gentleness and mercy. He was created for the purpose of making everyone happy, and his actions were based on this belief.

"The people in the Great Tomb of Nazarick find happiness in serving Ainz-sama."

Demiurge nodded in agreement.

“I see. Let me ask you, Peruchinera, do you mean that other people will feel happy when they serve Nazarick?”

“How could that be, I don’t mean that. Serving Ainz-sama makes us so happy that we could cry tears of joy. But if they were forced to do the same, that’s not happiness.”

“Ohh, then what should we do about this?”

“Simple, just pick one person and cut off his arms. That way, the others will compare themselves with him and know that they are more fortunate. How wonderful. And to make the one whose arms

were chopped off feel blessed, we just need to chop off another person's legs. Ahh, I made so many people happy!"

Demiurge looked with satisfaction at the clown that was throwing his head back in laughter.

"I see, you are right."

Part 2

It felt long if you spent all your time waiting, but when you prepare for something with a deadline, you would feel that time passed by in a flash.

The promised time had come.

That day, the burning sun crawled

up in the sky as slow as a tortoise, the sky was blue and devoid of clouds. There was no sound from the wind, the world seemed so quiet that you could hear a pin drop.

The tension was so thick that you could cut it with a knife.

Some of them gulped, others breath in deeply.

An unknown amount of time passed since the gathered Lizardmen had turned silent.

Suddenly, a dark cloud that seemed to appear from a hole in the sky spread speedily across the blue sky just like it did before.

Shortly after, the cloud blocked out the entire sky, and the surroundings

dimmed with the absence of sunlight—

The Lizardmen saw countless undead march slowly from the border dividing the forest from the wetlands. With the trees in the way, it was impossible to tell how many of them there were, they just kept emerging like an endless flood.

The invaders included 2,200 zombies, 2,200 skeletons, 300 undead beasts, 150 skeleton archers, 100 Skeleton Riders. An army of 4,950, not including the commander and its guards.

Opposing them was the five-tribe alliance of Lizardmen.

The Green Claw had 103 warriors, 4

druids, 7 hunters, 124 male Lizardmen and 105 female Lizardmen.

The Small Fang had 65 warriors, 1 druid, 16 hunters, 111 male Lizardmen and 94 female Lizardmen.

The Razor Tail had 89 heavy armor warriors, 3 druids, 6 hunters, 99 male Lizardmen and 81 female Lizardmen.

The Dragon Tusk had 125 warriors, 2 druids, 10 hunters, 98 male Lizardmen and 32 female Lizardmen.

The Red Eye had 47 warriors, 15 druids, 6 hunters, 59 male Lizardmen and 77 female

Lizardmen.

Their combined strength were 429 warriors, 26 druids, 45 hunters, 491 male Lizardmen and 389 female Lizardmen. A total of 1,380 troops, excluding the tribal chiefs and Zaryusu.

The battle where one side outnumbered the other by three to one thus began.

♦ ♦ ♦

It was a house made from wood.

There were no decorations, the wooden structure was plain to see and the design was as plain as a cabin. But the ceiling was five meters from the floor while the length and width were more than 20 meters either way.

There was almost no furniture inside, just a giant mirror on the wall, a huge and sturdy table as well as the chairs around it.

Several people were seated on the chairs, and parchments rolled into scrolls were placed on the table before them—scrolls imbued with magic.

“And finally, these are the last set.

These are teleportation scrolls.”

After the loud voice of a young girl said so, another scroll was placed on the table.

The one who took out the scrolls was a human female in maid attire.

The young girl had a cute face, with her hair tied up into buns on either sides of her head. But she had a distinct aura about her, with the most exceptional thing being her eyes.

Her eyes were big and round, but there were no light in them, just like low-grade glass balls, and she never blinked.

Her petite body was covered by a modified maid costume, with

propped collars covering her neck completely. Aside from her face, she didn't show any skin at all.

She was one of the battle maids, Entoma Vasilissa Zeta.

"And, this is the 「Message」 scroll, but there are a lot. Could someone please tidy up the table?"

Entoma requested the figure occupying the seat of honor and that person nodded slowly.

"Tidy it up."

"Alright~, please clean it up quickly then."

With Cocytus's acknowledgement and Entoma's instruction, the figures surrounding the table

started working together.

They were all of the heteromorphic races, some had the form of a praying mantis, some looked like ants, there were even ones that seemed to be an exposed brain.

They might all appear different, but they had two common points. They were all servants of Cocytus and they belonged to the organization of Nazarick.

That was why they obeyed the command of Entoma who was weaker than them.

In the power structure of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, the most important thing wasn't combat power, but the fact that one was a

creation of the Supreme Rulers. From this point of view, Entoma had a high level of authority.

After confirming that the tables had been cleared—

“Well then, please accept this, Cocytus-sama.”

—Entoma said without moving her mouth, picking up the bag by her feet and fished out several scrolls of parchment.

“These are 「Message」 scrolls. According to Ainz-sama, these are made from skins Demiurge-sama went through great effort to obtain. Ainz-sama conveys that he wants a report if there are any problems when using them.”

“I see... Understood. I will test this out.”

Cocytus used one of his four hands to pick up several of the scrolls.

“Demiurge has pulled further ahead.”

Cocytus said to his subordinates with a wry smile. When his subordinate heard that, they smiled along too.

With the parchment in his hand, Cocytus fell into deep thought.

He had heard about the stock of low-level magic scrolls being diminished gradually.

Finding a place that would provide the raw ingredients to make various

types of items was an important issue that needed to be resolved. They had plenty of stock right now, but it would deplete with constant use. And so, a lot of people had started taking action, including their master.

Cocytus heard that the apple tree in the 6th Floor was one part of the plan.

For Cocytus whose duty was to guard Nazarick, he couldn't do anything, which was obvious since he wouldn't be able to move out and search for ingredients.

Demiurge who was creating an outpost outside would definitely solve the problem. This was something he expected.

His comrade completed his duty.

Cocytus should be happy for him, and he actually was, but he couldn't completely suppress the fire of jealousy in his heart. For his comrade to be of use to the Supreme Ruler—the master they adored—made him envious.

His mission was to defend Nazarick.

This important task was probably more crucial than any orders received by the other Guardians. No matter who you asked, they would answer that this was a crucial task. They had to keep the lowly ones from desecrating the residence of the Supreme Rulers.

However without invaders, there was no way to prove Cocytus's loyalty and hard work.

That was why Cocytus wanted to achieve something.

For the Guardians, aiding their master would bring a strong sense of joy. Cocytus wanted to taste that happiness too.

And that chance was right before him now.

Cocytus turned his head and looked at the scene reflected in the mirror and tightened his grip on the scroll.

What was shown wasn't the indoors, but a location somewhere in the wetlands. Indeed, the scene shown in the Mirror of Remote

Viewing was the reason why Cocytus was holed up for two days in this wooden house built by Aura.

The battle this time—no, in the face of the absolute strength of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, it would be a one-sided slaughter, so it was just a means of collecting carcasses. When Cocytus received this harvesting mission, his master gave him several orders.

One, Cocytus was prohibited from taking to the field. This included his servants. The issue had to be solved with the troops that were allocated.

Two, the Lich assigned as the commander was to be held in reserve until the last moment.

Three, he was to carry out the mission by his own judgement.

There were some other minute details, but the main points were these three.

He had to use the soldiers dispatched to the lakeside region to obtain victory. If he were to succeed, Cocytus could then display his loyalty to his glorious master.

“Thank you for your hard work, please relay my thanks to Ainz-sama.”

Entoma nodded weakly.

“And so... Will you be going back?”

“No, I received orders to witness the battle here till the very end.”

So she was here as an observer.

Cocytus concluded, and felt hot-blooded thinking about the heavy responsibility bestowed on him.

‘Well then, time to begin.’

Cocytus activated 「Message」 and issued an order to the undead commander.

“—Advance.”

♦ ♦ ♦

Two bonfires on elevated platforms illuminated the surroundings with flickering light.

On the stage stood several Lizardmen, comprising of the tribal chiefs and key figures.

Before the stage was a large group of Lizardmen preparing for battle, the noise they were making undulating like waves. Uneasiness, anxiety and fear—they tried their best to conceal these emotions, but they couldn't hold down their worries, that was why they were so noisy.

What followed next would be war. The friend beside you might become a corpse the next moment, the one who might fall in battle

could be themselves. What they would be marching into would be a cruel field of battle.

Shasuryu Shasha stepped forward from amongst the tribal chieftains to stop the rowdiness.

“All Lizardmen, listen up!”

The majestic voice echoed out and the open space became silent, making Shasuryu’s voice exceptionally clear.

“I know that we face a great number of foes.”

No response, but the uneasiness could be seen clearly in the eyes of all present.

Shasuryu paused momentarily and

continued loudly.

“But do not fear! For the first time in history, we the five tribes have formed an alliance. After this alliance, we are now all of one tribe. That’s why, the ancestral spirits of the five tribes will watch over us— and bless us even if we were of a different tribe in the past.”

“Head Druids of all tribes!”

Taking the cue, Crusch led the five head druids of the tribes and stepped forward. She removed the dress covering her and revealed her white scales.

“Leader of the Head Druids, Crusch Lulu!”

In response to Shasuryu’s

introduction, Crusch took another step forward.

“Let our ancestors descend!”

“—Listen, children of this large tribe!”

What was this new tribe?

Crusch spoke with determination. Her voice was tense at times, calm at others; alternating between a mighty roar and the melody of song.

In the beginning, almost everyone was disgusted by Crusch’s albino appearance, but seeing how she presented herself confidently, the feelings of dislike faded away.

Crusch’s body swayed gently during

her speech. The white scales sparkled brilliantly under the light of the bonfire—the reflected gleam made it look as if the ancestors had descended onto Crusch.

Everyone's face started to show signs of adoration.

"Now, our five tribes are now one, that means the ancestors of the five tribes will watch over all of us! We are all witnesses! All Lizardmen! Behold the countless ancestors—descend by our side!"

Crusch spread her arms out with a grand gesture, pointing to the sky. The gaze of all present followed, but what they saw was just the cloudy sky with no signs of miracles descending. But someone said

something softly.

He said—there is a tiny beam of light.

The soft voice gradually became big, several other Lizardmen said: “I see them.” Some said they were small beams of light; some shouted they saw Lizardmen descending; some uttered that were large fishes; some screamed these were children; some even uttered in disbelief those were eggs.

All the Lizardmen had the same thought in mind—the ancestors really descended.

“The ancestors are here to protect us!”

It was only natural for them to

shout something like that.

“Feel this! Feel the power flowing into your body!”

Crusch’s voice reached the hearts of everyone, the sound seemed so far, yet so near.

Led by that voice, the Lizardmen felt some sort of energy surging into their bodies.

“Feel it! Feel the strength bestowed onto you by the ancestors of the five tribes!”

All the Lizardmen present definitely felt it.

They felt that surging power. The feeling of their hot blood flowing washed away all their unease, their

body started heating up as if they just drunk alcohol.

This could be taken as the best proof of their ancestors descending.

Crusch looked away from the revel faces of the Lizardmen and nodded to Shasuryu.

“Lend me your ears, Lizardmen. The ancestors have descended onto us. We cannot match the enemy in numbers, but will we lose?”

“No!”

The Lizardmen intoxicated in the atmosphere responded to Shasuryu in unison, shaking the very air.

“That’s right! With the ancestors upon us, it is impossible for us to

lose! Defeat the enemy, and present victory to our ancestors!”

“Warrghh!”

The Lizardmen were in high spirits, no one felt uneasy anymore. There were only Lizardmen who had morphed into warriors as they headed toward the battle that was upon them.

They were not charmed by magic. Even with so many druids, there was no way they could spare the energy before battle to cast such magic on all the gathered Lizardmen.

This was just the effect of the special drink that was given to all Lizardmen before the ceremony.

It was a beverage that granted courage, passed down from previous generations of Lizardmen. It was brewed from a special herb that made the Lizardmen feel intoxicated, happy and see an illusion for a short period of time.

Crusch's speech was just buying time for the herb to take effect.

Once the truth was known, it wasn't much. But for those who saw the effects with their own eyes—the Lizardmen who witnessed the ancestors descending, it was a ritual that brought out the courage in them.

"Well then, we will hand out the paint to everyone. It used to be one color for each tribe, but right now

the ancestors from all five tribes are among us, so use all the colors to paint yourself!"

Several druids carried pots and walked through the Lizardmen crowd.

The Lizardmen took paint from the pot and started drawing war paint on themselves. They believed these were the drawings of the ancestors that had descended onto them, so they allowed their fingers to move freely, painting patterns onto their bodies.

With the ancestors from all five tribes descending onto them, many of the Lizardmen covered their whole body with paint. But the Lizardmen from the Green Claw

didn't draw much war paint on themselves. This was because Zaryusu, Shasuryu and the elites of the tribes didn't draw any. In a way, this was like fans imitating their idol.

After surveying the crowd and confirming that everyone had finished, Shasuryu drew his greatsword and pointed at the main gate.

"Move out!"

"WARGGHHH!!"

Countless roars shook the surroundings.

Part 3

The forces of the Great Tomb of Nazarick were roughly divided in two and deployed onto the wetlands.

From the view of the Lizardmen, the zombies were on the left while the skeletons were on the right. Skeleton archers and riders were positioned behind the skeletons.

Undead beasts were situated behind as the core of the army.

The Lizardmen army had a smaller force and were divided into two groups as well. Facing the zombies were female Lizardmen and hunters, while the warriors and male Lizardmen were set against the skeletons. The druids were placed inside the village protected

by walls.

The Lizardmen formed up outside the village because there was nothing to be gained from a defensive battle. They had no incoming reinforcements and the walls weren't really sturdy. On the other hand, the undead army didn't require any provisions or rest.

With such a disadvantageous position, a defensive siege battle would be foolish.

But after both sides set up formation, the difference in numbers was clearly shown.

One Lizardman had to fight against three, ten against thirty, the ratio remained the same. But the

difference was prominent when it was a thousand against three thousand. Just lining up 3,000 undead was highly intimidating.

Even so, the Lizardmen did not show any fear. With their ancestors descended amongst them, numbers were not a problem.

Moments later, the undead army started advancing slowly. The first to move were the zombies and the skeletons. The skeleton archers and riders remained in place, therefore they were probably conserving their forces.

The Lizardmen army started their march too.

“Warrrggghh!”

Deafening roars covered the entire wetlands, followed by the splashing of water. The mud flew everywhere and the water splashed.

The two armies continued their advance and were about to clash mightily. At this moment, something happened to the forces of Nazarick.

Although the zombies and skeletons moved forth at the same time, their pace was different. This was because the zombies were slow and stiff while the skeletons were agile and fast. Most important of all, they were in the wetlands which affected mobility.

The movements of the stiff zombies were obstructed by the mud,

slowing them down. But the light skeletons were not affected much.

Hence, the first to clash were the skeletons and the Lizardmen warriors.

The Lizardmen did not have any formation, simply charging ahead to engage the enemy, with no stratagem to speak of.

Leading the way were the five warrior captains from each of the tribes. For the commanders to be on the front lines could be considered foolish in some ways. But they were the highest ranking combatants, so the morale of the Lizardmen would plummet if they didn't lead from the front. Thanks to their efforts, all the Lizardmen were highly

motivated.

Right behind them were the 89 Razor Tail heavy armor warriors. Wearing leather armor and shields, this group had the highest defense among all the tribes.

With their shields raised, they formed a wall that was charging into the skeleton army.

An intense collision—the vanguards of the warriors and skeletons smashed into each other.

In that instant, countless bones flew everywhere as the Lizardmen unit crashed a hole into the skeleton formation.

Angry roars accompanied the cracking sound of bones. There

were occasional moans of pain, but the bone-cracking sounds were overwhelmingly louder.

The Lizardmen gained a staggering advantage in the first clash.

If it were a human army instead, the result would be reversed.

Because the skeletons were made up of bones, piercing weapons were ineffective and they had resistance toward slashing attacks too. Hence, for a human army with swords as their primary weapons, it would be difficult to deal effective damage against the skeletons.

Because of their blunt weapons such as maces and warhammers, the Lizardmen completely gained

the upper hand. The bane of skeletons were blunt weapons.

Whenever a Lizardman swung the weapon in their hand, the bones of the skeletons shattered easily. Even if they survived one hit, they would be crushed in the next attack. On the other hand, whenever the skeletons attacked with their rusty swords, they were deflected from the tough scaly skin of the Lizardmen. Some of them were hurt, but no one suffered mortal wounds.

The very first clash.

The shattered bones of five hundred skeletons littered the wetlands just like that.

♦ ♦ ♦

The image reflected in the mirror stunned Cocytus.

It was just the initial clash, but the combat prowess of the Lizardmen were beyond his imagination. Cocytus was an excellent warrior and could judge how good his opponent was to a certain extent. The skeletons were behind the Lizardmen in single combat. But they should be able to make up for it with their numbers.

But it ended with such a result, what was happening? It even made Cocytus suspect that the Lizardmen were strengthened by some unknown powers.

The ones that could defeat the Lizardmen in combat would probably be the skeleton archers and riders.

As Cocytus was observing the situation, the skeletons were being crushed. The usefulness of the skeletons and zombies were reduced to tiring the opponents.

In that case, the effective forces would be the remaining 300 undead beasts, 150 skeleton archers and 550 Skeleton Riders. They were outnumbered instead.

Cocytus started calculating in his heart.

The undead were strong in battle, especially in a drawn-out fight. The undead didn't feel anything, and wouldn't feel neither fear nor pain. They didn't need rest or sleep.

The advantage these characteristics brought were evident with no need for any explanation.

For example, most creatures would fall from a powerful hit from a mace to the head. Even if they didn't die, they would bleed profusely and feel pain. The one who got hit would lose all will to fight. Some warriors who were trained to resist pain might be able to stand their ground, but most

people would lose the will to fight.

This was natural for living beings.

But what about the undead?

Smash its head? It would keep on attacking.

Break its arm? It would stab at you with its stump.

Take out its legs? It would crawl at you.

Indeed, as long as their negative life force remained, the undead would continue to fight. As long as the condition for its death was not met —which was cutting its head off for most undead—it wouldn't lose its will to fight like humans. This meant that the undead were in a

way, the perfect soldier.

In terms of individual strength, the Lizardmen obviously had the upper hand. But that could change.

Cocytus raised his evaluation of the Lizardmen by one level and acknowledged that they were not enemies that could be defeated easily. What he needed to do now was to turn this into a battle of attrition.

“How about retreating for now and observing the situation?”

“I believe this is a wise move, Cocytus-sama.”

“Sending out the skeleton archers and riders might be a better option, Master.”

“No, I think we should press on with the attack and sap them of their stamina, Cocytus-sama.”

“How would waiting for them to tire help? If we can’t destroy the enemy’s base camp, they would be able to rest and recover right?”

“Indeed. Our foes have strengthened their defenses with just a fragile wall. How about taking that village and routing them?”

After hearing the response from his underlings, Cocytus picked up a 「Message」 scroll. He glanced at Entoma from the corner of his eyes and observed her expression.

Entoma seemed disinterested as she looked in the direction of the

mirror. She was putting green biscuits she took from somewhere toward her chin. In the next instant, clear cracking sounds could be heard. Her attitude seemed to be implying that she wasn't involved. That was probably why her facial expression was blank.

—Wrong, that expressionless face was just a decoration.

Cocytus remembered her true identity and realized how stupid he was when he tried to read her expression.

She was a Familiar Eater. Even Cocytus's friend, one of the 'Evil Five', Kyouhukou6 said without hesitation that 'she is the most scary one'. That was Entoma's true

identity.

Cocytus gave up trying to read Entoma's thoughts from her face and used the scroll to issue the instruction to the commander.

♦ ♦ ♦

"Are they looking down on us?"

Zenberu mumbled. He wasn't loud, but it was enough for everyone surveying the enemy from on top of the mud walls to hear.

“Their archers and riders are still held in reserve, I think they are underestimating us…”

“That’s right, I thought the enemy would charge at us in one go…”

“Fight with zombie, smooth.”

There were only 45 hunters fighting the zombies. Using hit and run tactics by throwing rocks at them, the hunters were luring the zombies slowly away from the skeletons. The female Lizardmen moved slowly to the flank of the skeletons.

“Aren’t their movements rather queer?”

“…Indeed.”

Instead of being lured, the zombies were focusing completely on the hunters. Was the commander agreeing with this? No, there was no way any commander would accept this, but in actual fact, that was how the zombies were moving. Then, what was the objective of the enemy? Everyone present was baffled by this.

“I don’t understand why they are moving this way.”

“Yes, I agree with Shasuryu.”

No matter how they thought about it, there didn’t seem to be any purpose in the zombies’ action.

Zaryusu thought about it for a moment and shared his thoughts

with the others.

“Maybe there is no commander?”

“No commander...? Ah, you mean the undead are just following the very first instruction they received?”

“Yes, correct.”

Among the undead, the lowest tier comprising of skeletons and zombies lacked intelligence, so giving timely orders would be the most efficient way to utilize them. But the enemies this time felt as if the only order they received was to eliminate any Lizardmen near them. That was what Zaryusu meant.

“That is to say our foes thought they could win against us if they

have the numbers... No, could this battle be just an experiment to see how well the undead fight without a commander?"

"That may be so."

"Damn it! What kind of joke is this?"

The one lashing out in anger wasn't Zenberu, but Shasuryu. Even Shasuryu couldn't take it anymore, the Lizardmen were betting their lives on this war.

"Calm down Shasuryu, it might not be so simple."

"Ah, my apologies... It is a good thing that we have the upper hand."

"You are right Elder Brother, we

have to use this chance to diminish the enemies' numbers."

The fatigue from battle was heavy, the mental strain would be enormous in a chaotic fight. Without knowing if the enemy would come from the front, back, left or right, just swinging your weapon under such conditions a few times would be much more tiring than normal.

But the undead wouldn't get fatigued and would fight without rest.

The difference between the living and the undead would become more prominent with the passage of time.

Time was the enemy for the Lizardmen.

“Tch, I want to take the field too.”

“Endure, Zenberu.”

If the skilled Zenberu was to join the fray, they could level the skeletons in no time. But that would mean revealing their own trump cards. Zaryusu and the other five were the ace in the hole. They had to show their ace if the situation called for it, but before the strongest foe showed itself, they must not show their hand.

“But wouldn’t it play right into our hand if the enemy doesn’t advance?” Zaryusu said to the others. The others agreed with him,

and Zaryusu asked Crusch who was beside him: “How are things on your end?”

“...Yes, the ritual is going as planned.”

Crusch answered as she looked inside the village behind them. The group of druids were performing a ritual inside the village that could become another ace for the Lizardmen. It usually took a lot of time, but with all the druids of all five tribes gathered here, the progress was sped up and it could be used in this battle.

“...Teamwork, what an amazing thing.”

“Yeah... That’s true, we did share

some information after that war... But there are so many more things I want to do after the war now."

The other tribal chiefs strongly agreed with Zaryusu's view. They shared their knowledge because of this war, and witnessed first-hand the importance of developing together as a community. There were alliances in the past, but the three chiefs who didn't exchange views in the past were doing so more freely now.

Zaryusu smiled as he looked at the five of them.

"What's so funny?"

"Nothing, it is just that despite being in such a situation, I still feel

really glad."

Crusch understood Zaryusu's thoughts immediately.

"—Me too, Zaryusu."

Seeing Crusch smiling brilliantly, Zaryusu squinted his eyes as if he was looking at something bright. Both of their eyes were filled with admiration and love for each other.

They didn't touch each other physically. That was obvious. After all, there were Lizardmen dying out there even at this very moment. They couldn't do as they pleased despite knowing that. But their tails were like independent creatures, squirming around and tangling together sometimes.

“Muu...”

“As the older brother, how does it feel?”

“We are out of their loop.”

“How passionate.”

“In conclusion... It’s good to be young. Their future is bright.”

The four older Lizardmen nodded in unison as they watched their cute juniors.

It was impossible for Zaryusu and Crusch to miss that. Although their tails were twitching about, they still had poker faces.

“Elder Brother, the enemy is moving.”

Shasuryu and the others smiled wryly as Zaryusu shifted gears so suddenly. They looked toward the enemy formation and saw the Skeleton Riders flank the battle in front of them before advancing.

“Hey hey, are they charging for us?”

“With Skeleton Riders? Are they planning to bring down our morale by striking at us?”

“No, they are probably flanking to the rear of the warriors and male Lizardmen to surround them.”

Not good.

Everyone came to the same conclusion that the mobility of the Skeleton Riders was a threat.

If the Skeleton Riders were deployed at the start of the battle, the Lizardmen could exterminate them first. Right now, the warriors and male Lizardmen were in a chaotic fight, the hunters were luring the zombies and the female Lizardmen were throwing rocks from the flank of the skeletons, there were no available forces to stop the Skeleton Riders.

“I think we should take action.”

Accepting the proposition from the chief of the Small Fang, Shasuryu nodded in agreement.

“The problem is who we should send... Let’s show the enemy our strength.”

♦ ♦ ♦

Skeleton Riders.

Skeletons with lances riding on skeletal horses. Nothing special to note except their strong mobility, which was exceptional in the wetlands. With their bodies made from bones, their feet sunk shallowly into the mud, allowing them to traverse the terrain with the speed of horses.

The 100 Skeleton Riders took the

roundabout way to the back of the Lizardmen army for a pincer attack.

They could see three Lizardmen running at them to the left of their advancing route—which was the direction of the village—but the Skeleton Riders ignored them. Without any orders, they would ignore anything if they were not attacked. That was the kind of monster the unintelligent undead was.

They almost reached the rear of the Lizardmen army when the Skeleton Rider leading the charge suddenly tumbled. The Skeleton Rider was flung high into the air before it fell heavily into the wetlands.

A human would be confused and

wouldn't be able to act immediately. But the unintelligent undead Skeleton Rider moved instantly in order to carry out its instructions.

It stood up immediately, but was limping slightly due to the damage.

That skeleton was hit by another Skeleton Rider, and their bones were scattered all over the wetlands.

Such a scene happened consecutively in several places.

The reason this was happening in the wetlands? The answer was simple—traps.

Open boxes were buried in the ground and the horses would

tumble if they were to spring the traps.

The Skeleton Riders fell one after another. If they were humans, they would slow their advance. But the Skeleton Riders didn't do that. They had enough wits to avoid a hole that was already there, but still fell for hidden traps. They didn't receive any orders to do so and didn't have the intelligence to make such a decisive judgement.

The scene of them going full speed into traps was like mass suicide.

The traps might be very effective, but they could only stall for time. Some damage was dealt to the Skeleton Riders, but it was not enough to destroy them. The

Skeleton Riders that had fallen all over the place got up with their bodies covered in mud.

At this moment, a whistling sound was heard and the head of a Skeleton Rider flew off just like that.

The Skeleton Riders saw this as an act of hostility and looked around the vicinity.

Another skeleton's head was knocked off like shattered glass.

The Skeleton Riders discovered three Lizardmen about 80 meters away from them. They could also see them using slingshots, shooting rocks to snipe the heads of the Skeleton Riders——

The Skeleton Riders started moving.

At the same time, the fight with the skeletons was changing.

With the sound of bow strings releasing, arrows rained down on the battlefield.

The 150 skeleton archers fired arrows at the skeletons and the Lizardmen simultaneously. It wasn't just one shot, but two, three...

This was an unexpected assault for the Lizardmen.

Several Lizardmen were hit and fell. They couldn't defend against the arrows while they fought against the skeletons.

The skeletons were hit too, but took no damage.

Placing the skeletons that were resistant to piercing attacks in the front and the skeleton archers firing from the back was a great combination. With the time needed to defeat 2,200 skeletons, this tactic would be enough to wipe out the Lizardmen.

But the problem was that this tactic was implemented too late. If it was used at the very beginning, the Lizardmen would definitely be in a dire state. The skeletons would then overwhelm them with numbers and earn a decisive victory. But it was too late.

Ignoring the dwindling skeletons,

the Lizardmen charged at the skeleton archers.

The arrows from the 150 skeleton archers fell like rain, downing several Lizardmen into the mud, but it was just a small number.

With the thick skin and hard scales of the Lizardmen, their defense was on par with humans wearing leather armor. Even if arrows pierced their skin, their tough muscles might be able to stave off fatal injury.

Another reason for the minimal casualties were the weak arrow shots. They didn't have enough power to kill the Lizardmen.

The Lizardmen roared fearlessly as

they charged. In the face of the rain of arrows, the Lizardmen crossed their arms to protect their heads, braving ahead even if their bodies were pierced.

On the third volley of arrows—

This was the limit of how fast the skeleton archers could shoot. If they had intelligence, they would probably retreat. If they moved back and regrouped with the surviving undead army, they could be utilized in a better way.

But the skeletons did not have the mental capacity to store such complicated instructions. They didn't receive any other orders, so they simply executed their original mission—Even with the Lizardmen

closing in, they could only fire arrows at them.

With a roar, the skeleton archers were swarmed by the Lizardmen, just like they did to the skeletons. At this distance, archers lost their advantage and could only be attacked one-sidedly. As they fell one after another, almost all the skeletons had fallen in the wetlands, and just the army of zombies was left.

Finally, a new enemy was unleashed.

Undead beasts.

Undead created from wolves, snakes, cobras and all sorts of animals. A monster that combined

the tenacity of zombies with the agility of animals.

The undead beasts rushed at the Lizardmen. The fast moved quickly, the slow traveled slowly, an assault with no formation to speak of.

The attack coming from down low was unexpectedly hard to evade. The undead beasts would gnaw onto the feet of the enemy. After immobilizing them, they would deal the killing blow, a style similar to wild beasts.

For the Lizardmen that were getting more and more tired, this attack was difficult to fend off. Several Lizardmen whose movements had dulled got their necks torn apart by the undead beasts. Even those who

believed the spirits of their ancestors were with them couldn't help but panic when they saw their comrades fall.

The Head Warriors fought at the front, but were pushed back slowly. As they were thinking that it was just a matter of time before their battle lines would be broken, the wetlands suddenly swelled up.

What appeared were two conical masses of earth about 160 cm in height, with no head or limbs.

The two masses started moving.

They moved smoothly across the wetlands despite the absence of limbs, heading straight for the undead beasts. After closing the

distance, whips that were longer than their height emerged from where their shoulders should be.

This was one of the Lizardmen's trump cards, the fairy of the wetlands summoned through the combined effort of all the Lizardmen's druids.

The wetland fairies charged into the midst of the undead beasts, flinging their whip-like tentacles to grab the enemies. The undead beasts engaged them ferociously with claws and fangs.

It was a battle between creatures without fear. But the wetland fairies had the advantage due to their superior combat power.

Their druids could overpower the undead. This fact revived the courage of the Lizardmen and they renewed their attack.

An intense battle ensued

Unlike the fight with the skeletons, the Lizardmen also suffered casualties. But the scale of victory was tilting toward the Lizardmen that had the advantage in pure numbers.

♦ ♦ ♦

He was going to lose.

Cocytus understood this fact.

His forces lacked any undead that had intelligence. That was the reason for the loss, and was something he was worried about from the very beginning, but Cocytus didn't imagine the army to be this weak.

Cocytus regretted deeply for his shallow thinking. There was a way to turn the tide under such a situation, but it wasn't a good method as taking such a step was equivalent to admitting his loss.

On the other hand, how could he report this failure to his master? Cocytus picked up the 「Message」

scroll. Who should he contact at such a crucial moment—

"...Is this Demiurge?"

[Yes my friend. For you to actually message me, something happened?]

A steady voice sounded out in Cocytus's mind. Demiurge's intelligence was top-notch in Nazarick, he might be able to think of a solution.

In a way, Demiurge was one of Cocytus's rivals, so Cocytus was not too fond of asking him for help. But avoiding defeat took priority, how could an army from the Great Tomb of Nazarick fail? To avoid losing the fight, Cocytus threw away his pride and lowered his

head for help.

“Actually—”

After using a scroll to explain the current situation, Demiurge who listened quietly gave a troubled sigh.

[And what do you need from me?]

“I wish for you to lend me your wisdom, the battle will be lost if this carries on. I can accept it if it was my personal fight, but I do not wish for Nazarick and the Supreme Rulers to be disgraced by this.”

[Does Ainz-sama truly wish for victory?]

“What do you mean by this?”

[I am talking about why Ainz-sama formed an army from such lowly serfs.]

Cocytus also had doubts about this. He couldn't fathom why they had to form an army from the lowest servants in the Great Tomb of Nazarick.

"...Ainz-sama must have his reasons, but what is his intention?"

[...I can think of several possibilities.]

'As expected of Demiurge'—Cocytus didn't express this out loud and kept his respect in his heart.

[Let me ask you...Cocytus. You have been in this place for several days now, shouldn't you be gathering

intelligence on the Lizardmen before the attack?]

Demiurge was right. But—

“But Ainz-sama ordered me to defeat them with the forces given, and to do so in a direct confrontation.”

[That might be so, but I want to think about it carefully, Cocytus. The important thing should be what kind of result do you want to present to Ainz-sama, right? If the objective was the destruction of the village, you would need to consider the best way to go about it, correct?]

Cocytus couldn’t answer, Demiurge got right to the point.

[Ainz-sama must have considered

all this when he gave those serfs to you.]

“...You mean Ainz-sama intentionally gave me forces that wouldn’t be able to win the fight?”

[That possibility is high. If you had collated intelligence beforehand, you might have been able to tell that the forces you have on hand is not sufficient to take the village. In that case, you should report to Ainz-sama that ‘the current forces are not enough to complete the mission, I will need more reinforcements’. That should be Ainz-sama’s goal.]

Which meant that Cocytus had to understand the true intention of his master. He should not just follow

orders blindly and had to make adjustments on the fly. That was what Demiurge was trying to say.

[This was Ainz-sama's method of changing our way of thinking. But he seemed to have another objective as well...]

"What else is there?"

Cocytus asked Demiurge in panic. He had already made one mistake, he didn't want to risk another one.

[Ainz-sama sent out messengers to the villages, but did not mention Nazarick by name. He also forbid you from taking the field. This means—]

Cocytus gulped and waited for Demiurge to carry on. But

Demiurge didn't continue.

[Urg! Cocytus, my apologies, I have an urgent matter to attend to. Sorry but I need to go, may you obtain victory.]

Demiurge cut off the communication suddenly and the 「Message」 ended.

Cocytus could guess what made the calm and collected Demiurge so flustered. He shifted his eyes onto someone in the room. He saw Entoma casually tearing off a tattered talisman from her forehead.

For a Talismancer to use a talisman meant—

Everything was too late.

It was time to deploy the undead that was held back until the very last moment, the ace card. But was this really the intention of his master?

This was probably the first time Cocytus thought about the intention behind the orders of his master. But he could only come to one conclusion.

Cocytus activated the 「Message」 spell.

“—Lich Commander, I order you to attack. Show the Lizardmen your true powers.”

♦ ♦ ♦

An old and luxurious robe covered its body of skin and bones. One of its hands was holding a twisted staff. Its rotting face was just a skin-covered skull with evil eyes full of intelligence in its sockets. The emitted negative energy covered its body like a thin fog.

This undead magic caster was—a Lich.

The undead obeyed Cocytus's command and looked at the wetlands. He then issued orders to the Blood Meat Hulks standing behind him. They were undead with

fresh red muscles and fat, made by the Supreme Ruler just like him.

“Kill those three Lizardmen.”

The two Blood Meat Hulks obeyed the orders and walked toward the three Lizardmen destroying the Skeleton Riders.

Although Blood Meat Hulks were low-tier undead that could only attack with brute force, they had regenerative abilities. If they were facing physical attacks on the same level as them, they would be able to stall for time.

The Lich was certain the Blood Meat Hulk could stall for sufficient time.

This wasn’t a good strategy. As a

magic caster, the Lich was not good in melee battles, so having the Blood Meat Hulks close to protect him was the orthodox way to fight.

However, he couldn't use such tactics.

The order he received was to 'show the Lizardmen your true powers'. Hence, he had to take the base camp of the Lizardmen alone with his overwhelming power.

As the Lich advanced, his terrifying face laughed softly.

He felt this was too easy.

As a creation of the Supreme Ruler Ainz Ooal Gown, he was far superior to the Liches that spawn automatically in Nazarick. And his

mission was to display his might to the Lizardmen.

He vowed to win in the name of his master.

“I, Iguvua, will present this victory to my master.”

Part 4

After finishing the extermination of the undead beasts, the Lizardmen stooped their shoulders tiredly and sighed in relief. They were saddened by their losses, but had faint smiles as well.

There were many injuries, but they counted themselves lucky they didn’t lose more. If the wetland fairies didn’t join the fray... No, if

they had appeared any later, their formation would have been broken and they would have been routed.

“Let’s go.”

The Head Warrior said, announcing the commencement of the next fight.

Everyone was weak from fatigue, and only managed to pick up their weapons after some time, seeming too tired to wield them. They might be exhausted, but the war wasn’t over.

They were needed to take care of the zombies in the distance and guard against enemy reinforcements.

“Alright, bring the heavily wounded

back to the village, the rest follow us—”

A sudden burst of flame cut his speech short.

A heat wave radiated out to the surroundings, the two fairies caught in the midst of the fire were swaying weakly.

After the flame dispersed completely without a trace, the appearance of the two fairies was terrible. They were on the verge of falling from that one attack.

Before anyone could scream, the flame blasted once again. The fairies couldn’t withstand the attack and their bodies began to crumble, dispersing into the fire.

The powerful fairies that displayed unmatched strength against the undead beasts were gone. The Lizardmen couldn't process what was happening and had blank expressions.

What happened?

They knew the wetland fairies were destroyed, but they were rejecting this reality. If the two wetland fairies were really defeated, that meant a stronger monster than them was approaching.

The Lizardmen couldn't suppress their confusion and looked around in fear. When they saw an undead in the distance, a fireball was shot from its hand once again.

The fireball that was the size of a human head flew through the air and blasted into the Lizardmen unit taking point.

Normally, fire would be put out when it come into contact with water, but this fireball was a magical phenomenon and ignored such common sense. The moment the fireball hit the water surface, it exploded as if it had collided with solid ground, creating a tornado of fire.

The exploding flame engulfed several Lizardmen—and disappeared.

An illusion—it disappeared so fast that this was the feeling it gave. But the smell of burning flesh—from the

Lizardmen that laid on the ground motionless was definitely not an illusion.

The undead advanced slowly, its attitude so casual and arrogant. That was the pace of a powerful being confident in its strength.

As the Lizardmen were hesitating whether they should charge in just like how they had handled the skeleton archers, the fireball struck again.

The fierce explosion robbed several Lizardmen of their lives in a blink of an eye.

The overwhelming power made the previous battle seem like a game.

“Warrgghh!

The Lizardmen roared and shook off the fear in their hearts. As several of them were about to charge in with no regards for their lives, a cold voice erupted from an unimaginably far distance.

“—Fools.”

With this word, another fireball burned the charging Lizardmen before they could scream.

The undead moved slowly, and the hundreds of Lizardmen immediately took a step back. The wall separating the truly strong from the weak forced them back.

“Run!”

A spirited roar sounded out, shocking the Lizardmen like

lightning. It was one of the Head Warriors.

“That fellow is different from the other enemies! We are no match for it!”

That was correct. The enemy advanced slowly by itself, that majestic swagger made all the Lizardmen feel a chill on their skin.

“Run back and report to the Chiefs and Zaryusu.”

“Let us buy some time!”

Yet another fireball exploded, felling several Lizardmen.

“Run! Report to them!”

The five Head Warriors ordered the

Lizardmen to escape as they gauged the distance between each other. They spread out with the blast radius of the fireball in mind, their goal was for one of them to reach the enemy. It was a suicide formation for this sole purpose.

The five of them of them looked at each other after spreading out and sprinted at full speed.

The distance was about a hundred meters. It was a hopeless distance, but they still charged in with all their might. They knew even if they fell while rushing in, it would leave clues for the chiefs and Zaryusu who were watching from behind.

♦ ♦ ♦

The Lizardmen escaped, scattering like the spawns of a spider.

Zaryusu watched this scene calmly. No, Zaryusu had been watching its every move since the powerful enemy showed itself. Watching the undead that was spreading the flames of death.

The movements of this foe was different from the unintelligent enemy earlier, he was probably the enemy commander.

The undead started using the wide-area 「Fireball」 attack when the five Head Warriors were about a hundred meters from it. Even though they attacked from five different directions, all the Head Warriors attempting the assault were burned alive en route.

“It is time for us to fight.”

Zaryusu nodded in agreement with Zenberu, Crusch gave her consensus too. She acknowledged that the time when she might sacrifice on the battlefield had come.

“That’s right, it is our turn. That one is too powerful. This is probably the right-hand man of that Supreme One and the commander of this

army... At the very least, it must be an elite."

"Indeed, it is impossible for anyone to control several undead of that level. But how should we do this? It is a little too far away."

Crusch's question gave Zaryusu a headache.

Their aim was not to sacrifice themselves in battle, so a strategy was necessary.

Zaryusu and Zenberu couldn't fight at such a long distance, they had to close in for melee attacks. And the problem was this distance of 100 meters.

Zaryusu and the others could take a couple of hits from the 「Fireball」,

but they woud suffer more than a couple of attacks before they closed the gap. And the real test began after reaching the target. It was easy to see that taking the attack of the fireball from the front would kill them.

“Such a despairingly long distance.”

“Ah… Really, I didn’t know 100 meters could be so long.”

Zaryusu’s group thought about how to reach the enemy without injuries —or with minimal injuries.

“How about tunneling through the wetlands?”

“Even for the powers of a druid…that would be difficult. It would be great if we could use

「Invisibility」.”

They could sneak close immediately using 「Flight」 after casting 「Invisibility」. But these were not among the spells a druid could learn.

“How about making a shield while we advance?”

“Making a shield will take too much time.”

“What about dismantling...a house?”

Zenberu smiled wryly as he knew the proposal he just said wouldn’t work. The enemy was attacking with the 「Fireball」’s explosion, even if they could protect one side, the heat would still get in from the

side. There was no time to craft a full body shield to protect against the heat.

“Oh right...there is another way.”

“What is it, Zaryusu?”

Crusch who was a little afraid asked. ‘Did I make such a scary expression?’ Zaryusu thought. But it couldn’t be helped, he was so troubled that he wanted to curse out.

“No...I just...found a shield.”

♦ ♦ ♦

Iguvua nodded with satisfaction at the current situation.

It was progressing smoothly. The two Blood Meat Hulks were still battling, but he was making good progress toward the village.

There were several foolish Lizardmen that wanted to charge at him, but they seemed to understand the futility of their actions after witnessing the power of 「Fireball」. The five that spread out before the assault had the best record right now, but they only made it to fifty meters.

It was as though Iguvua was

walking alone in the wilderness as he advanced silently. He might pity the Lizardmen as weaklings, but he didn't let his guard down.

It was a short distance to the target village. He planned to shoot 「Fireball」 consecutively and raze the houses together with the Lizardmen.

But the Lizardmen would definitely try to stop him from reaching the village. It should be about time for someone to attack. Iguvua who was musing about this found himself proven right.

"...Oh, I see."

Iguvua saw a Hydra heading straight for him.

If that was the ace of the Lizardmen, he would crush it with overwhelming strength and sap their will to fight. That would make the destruction of the village simpler.

To play it safe, Iguvua checked for other enemies in the surroundings and the sky. After confirming it was clear, Iguvua stopped and waited leisurely for the Hydra to enter his attack range.

When the Hydra got into the region that was hard to determine whether if it was within the attack range, it started charging. Indeed, it at ran full speed toward Iguvua.

“Fools, you think you can cover this distance with your snail-like pace?

Beasts will just be beasts."

Iguvua laughed mockingly and shot the fireball he conjured at the Hydra.

The fireball flew straight and scored a direct hit on the Hydra, the eruption of flames engulfing it.

Although the Hydra staggered, it continued to advance. It carried on charging even though it was on fire. No, the flames dissipated instantly, is was just the imagination of Iguvua. The scene before Iguvua conveyed the exemplary determination of the Hydra.

Iguvua frowned with displeasure. His pride was seriously wounded when the beast endured the attack.

Indeed, the Hydra had a damage resistance buff casted on it, but it wasn't any of the high-tier spells and could not negate all the damage.

'...I remember Hydras have the special ability of fast regeneration... But it shouldn't work against fire attacks... No matter, it has high vitality since it is a monster. It is no surprise for it to tank one hit.'

Iguvua consoled himself that way, but he could not appease his wrath. Iguvua was a special creature created by the Supreme Ruler, Ainz Ooal Gown. It was disrespectful for the enemy not to fall from his attack.

Iguvua casted an icy glare that was

the opposite of his seething anger at the approaching Hydra.

“...How unpleasant, die!”

He fired a fireball once more, engulfing the Hydra in flames again. It even gave the illusion of charring flesh from such a distance. The wounds might not be fatal, but it would make it hesitate from advancing further.

But—

“—Why isn’t it stopping? Why is it still coming?”

Part 5

Rororo ran relentlessly. It might be huge, but it had a speed matching

the Lizardmen since it was traversing the wetlands. Ripples splashed everywhere with loud splattering sounds.

Its amber eyes turned white from the high temperature, two of its four heads had lost its strength.

Despite that, it ran.

Another 「Fireball」 struck Rororo squarely in the body. The heat inside the 「Fireball」 exploded in an instant, penetrating Rororo's entire being. It felt a pain equivalent to being punched all over its body, its eyes were dry as the fiery air burned its lungs.

With burns all over its body, the feedback of pain that came nonstop

from its body warned Rororo: it would die if it was hit again.

Even so—it ran.

Ran.

And ran.

It didn't stop advancing nor stop its feet. The high temperature peeled the scales away, warping the skin underneath it and blood gushed out. Despite that, it still ran.

Unintelligent beasts would have definitely escaped, but Rororo didn't.

Rororo was a type of monster called a Hydra.

There were all sorts of monsters,

with those that surpassed humans in intelligence, and those that were no different from animals. Rororo belonged to the latter.

For Rororo who was only as smart as a normal animal to continue advancing on the verge of death—towards Iguvua who was dealing such pain to it, it was incredible and hard to fathom.

In fact, even its enemy Iguvua was baffled, and suspected Rororo was being manipulated by magic.

But that was not so.

Indeed, that was not the answer.

Iguvua would probably never understand.

Rororo who only had the intelligence of a beast—it was running for the sake of family.

Rororo didn't know its parents, though not because of Hydras being the type of monster to abandon its offspring. Before it reached a certain age, it should have had lived with one of its parents to learn the way of survival through them. But why didn't Rororo do so?

That was because Rororo was a deformed baby. Normal Hydra would be born with eight heads, and that would increase as it grew older, up to the maximum of twelve heads.

But Rororo was born with just four heads, so its parents abandoned

Rororo and left with its other siblings.

Although Hydras become powerful creatures in their adulthood, it was only a matter of time before Rororo would have died in nature's harsh environment without its parent's protection during infancy.

If it wasn't for the male Lizardmen who happened to pass by and picked it up.

—And so, Rororo got a family that was its father, mother and close friend.

Rororo's consciousness was about to fall apart from the pain when it thought about a question it had always pondered.

Why was its body so big? Why did it have so many heads?

It thought about this when it looked at its foster parent. And Rororo held a belief from an old conclusion.

Some of its heads would fall off in the future, limbs would sprout out like grass and it would look like its foster parent.

If Rororo really morphed like that— what would it ask its parent to do?

That was it. They hadn't slept together for a long time, it would ask for that. They had to sleep apart because Rororo got too big, which made it feel a bit lonely.

The flames seemed to blow Rororo's thoughts away and filled

its entire field of vision as incredible pain hit its entire body. It moaned weakly as the pain pulsed through its entire body.

The pain was comparable to being hammered countless times.

It hurt so much that it couldn't think anymore.

Rororo's legs sent signals to stop advancing in the form of spasms.

But even so—

But even so—Rororo did not stop moving.

Rororo's advance got slower. Its muscles were burned and rigid, it couldn't maintain its usual running speed.

Just taking a step forward was hard.

It was hard to breathe and it hurt when it inhaled, its lungs probably being damaged by the heat.

Only one of its heads could move, the others were just a burden now. The image of the undead conjuring a fireball from its hand appeared vaguely in Rororo's murky eyes.

Its instinct as a living being told it one thing.

If it was hit again, it would definitely die. But Rororo was fearless as it relentlessly braved ahead—

That was the request of its parent and friend, that was why it would not stop.

As Rororo used all its might—although it was exhausted—to stumble forward a few steps, a red fireball flew from the hand of the undead once again, slicing through the air towards Rororo.

This hit would definitely rob Rororo of its life, that was an undeniable fact.

Death awaited it.

This was the end—

If—

Indeed—if that male Lizardman wasn't here.

Would that male Lizardman allow Rororo to die before his eyes?

Would he watch such injustice unfold in front of him?

That was impossible.

“— 「Icy Burst」!”

Zaryusu who was running behind Rororo leapt out to the side and shouted as he swung Frost Pain.

The air before his sword seemed to freeze instantly, forming a white wall of mist before Rororo. It was an extremely cold wave of air.

One of the abilities of Frost Pain.

A powerful skill that could only be used thrice a day— 「Icy Burst」, it could freeze everything within range instantly and deal heavy damage.

The wall of cold mist blocked the incoming 「Fireball」 as if it was a solid barrier. The fiery ball and chilly wall—according to magic theory, it was wise to counter one with the other.

It hit—

The ball burst into flames, struggling mightily against the white mist.

Both sides were like a white and red snake struggling and devouring each other. After pushing back each other for a moment, the two energies disappeared.

The undead was stunned and taken aback. It was the most natural reaction after seeing his spell

dissipating.

There was still some distance between the two groups, but they were close enough to make out each other's expressions—and actions. An impossible distance was covered thanks to Rororo's effort and determination, bringing the three Lizardmen this far with no injuries.

"Rororo..."

Zaryusu didn't know what to say. In the end, he chose a clear and simple phrase from the millions of expression in his mind.

"Thank you!"

After shouting his gratitude, Zaryusu sprinted without looking

back. Crusch and Zenberu were right behind him.

A weak cry that was almost inaudible came from behind. That was a cheer for one's family.

♦ ♦ ♦

Speechless. His 「Fireball」 was negated, making him express his disbelief with words.

"Impossible!"

Iguvua cast 「Fireball」 once more. He was not willing to acknowledge that the Lizardmen rushing at him had dispelled his magic.

A 「Fireball」 rocketed toward the three Lizardmen.

It was blocked by a wall of mist conjured by the leading Lizardman with his sword, and it disappeared together with the wall. Indeed, it was the same situation as before—

“Try all you want! I will block all your attacks!”

The angry roar of the Lizardman projected over.

Iguvua clicked his tongue with a face of displeasure.

‘For the magic casted by me, who was created by the Supreme Ruler Ainz-sama to be blocked by a mere Lizardman!’

Iguvua suppressed his wrath with all his might.

It was very likely that 「Fireball」 wouldn’t work anymore, but since they had to hide behind the Hydra during their approach, there should be a limit to how many times this defense could be used. It might be ten times, or it might only sap some stamina for each use and could be conjured indefinitely after recovering enough.

‘How should I deal with them? If possible, I want to test his words out...’

Iguvua could shoot many more fireballs, but it was hard to judge which of the Lizardman's words were true.

Iguvua and the Lizardmen were less than forty meters apart.

The Lizardmen charging in seemed to be warriors and as an undead magic caster, Iguvua wanted to avoid melee combat.

He couldn't use 「Fireball」 in this situation. Iguvua wasn't dumb enough to confirm how many times they could block his spell. If they didn't hide behind the Hydra in the beginning and had closed the distance, Iguvua might have tested it out. But that chance had been destroyed by that damn Hydra.

“Curses...just a mere Hydra.”

After spitting out these words, Iguvua decided his next course of action.

“—Well then, how about this?”

It just so happened that they were running in single file. Iguvua pointed his finger at the three charging Lizardmen who were drawing close. Electricity sparked on his finger.

“Taste my 「Lightning」!”

A white flash of lightning emerged and—

Even from this far, the white light on Iguvua’s finger could be seen—
「Lightning」.

「Icy Burst」 from Frost Pain could fend off fire or ice element attacks. But Zaryusu had never used it against lightning before, and wasn't sure if it would work.

Should they try their luck, or spread out to minimize the damage they would take?

Zaryusu gripped Frost Pain tightly.

The air was buzzing with static electricity, proving that a lightning attack was imminent.

"Leave this to me—!"

Zenberu made his judgment before Zaryusu did and jumped forth with a shout. The spell was casted at the same time.

“— 「Lightning」”

“Warrghhh— 「Resistance Massive」!”

When the lightning looked as if it would pierce through Zenberu, his body buffed up, deflecting the lightning arc that was supposed to hit the other two behind him.

「Resistance Massive」.

A skill of monks, granting the ability to reduce magical damage by dispersing the Qi from one’s body in an instant.

This was the skill Zenberu had learned as a traveler after losing to the Frost Pain’s 「Icy Burst」. Although it was a wide-area attack, it worked against any magic that

dealt damage.

Both friend and foe yelped, but Zaryusu and Crusch who trusted their teammate weren't too surprised. Hence, the Lizardmen drew nearer while the undead was shocked.

As Zaryusu ran, he finally figured something out.

If he used 「Icy Burst」 during his duel with Zenberu, he would have been blocked by this skill. He would have then been wide open for an attack and lost. That was probably why Zenberu was luring Zaryusu to use that skill.

"Haha! Too easy!"

Zenberu's casual voice made

Zaryusu smile, but his face tensed the next moment. Zaryusu realized that his voice had hints of pain in it.

Even a male Lizardman like Zenberu couldn't suppress his pain completely, his wounds must be serious. Furthermore, Zenberu wouldn't agree to hiding behind Rororo if this technique was perfect.

Zaryusu stared ahead, the enemy was less than twenty meters away. That impossible distance had been cut down to this last stretch.

With the distance drawing close, Iguvua judged the group before him to be strong foes that were not to be underestimated. They could defend against his spells and were worthy

of praise. Iguvua had other means of attacks, but he needed to consider his defenses too.

“Not bad for a sacrificial offering, worthy enough for me to show my might.”

Iguvua activated his magic with a cold sneer.

“「4th Tier Summon Undead」.”

The wetlands bubbled and skeletal bodies with four arms holding round shields and scimitars emerged to protect Iguvua. They were undead known as Skeleton Warriors, much more powerful than normal skeletons.

He could summon other undead, but he chose skeletons for their

resistance against ice attacks. Iguvua and monsters made from bones were immune to such ice attacks.

Iguvua looked loftily at the approaching enemies under the protection of his guards. That was the attitude of a king facing against challengers.

The distance had been closed.

There were just—10 meters left.

That was all that was left. After seeing that the undead showed no signs of attacking, he glanced backward.

He looked at the distance they had covered. This was a short distance for a sprint, but these one hundred

meters were deadly ground with no place to take cover. If they didn't have either Rororo, Frost Pain, Zenberu or Crusch, there was no way they could had made it through. But they had come so far and the enemy was within reach.

They overcame this distance.

Zaryusu was relieved to see Rororo being carried back to the village by the other Lizardmen. He then cursed himself for relaxing and glared at the undead.

Zaryusu admitted that it was a formidable opponent.

If he had not met it under such circumstances, Zaryusu would have definitely ran away already. His

instinct was telling him to escape just by seeing it face-to-face, and even his tail was standing on end. Zaryusu could see from the corner of his eyes that Zenberu's and Crusch's tails had the same reactions.

The two of them must be thinking about the same thing as Zaryusu. Indeed—they were doing everything they could to suppress their urge to flee as they faced the undead.

Zaryusu tapped the backs of the both of them with his tail.

The two of them looked at Zaryusu in surprise.

"We can win if we work together."

That was all that Zaryusu said.

“That’s right, we can win, Zaryusu.”

Crusch stroked her back that was patted by Zaryusu and replied.

“Hah, things are getting interesting!”

Zenberu answered with an arrogant smile.

And the three of them covered the final stretch.

♦ ♦ ♦

—Eight meters apart.

Zaryusu's group that had sprinted all this way was out of breath. In contrast, the undead had no need to breathe. The two groups locked eyes and the undead spoke first.

"I am the Lich serving the Supreme Ruler, Iguvua. If you forfeit now, I will grant you a painless death."

Zaryusu couldn't help smiling. He could tell this undead named Iguvua knew nothing at all.

No matter how you thought about it, there was only one answer.

Although Zaryusu was smiling, Iguvua didn't feel displeased and waited quietly for an answer. Iguvua knew he was strong and was

confident in disposing of Zaryusu's group. That was why he displayed the arrogance of the mighty, and was even thankful for saving him the hassle of walking all the way.

"Let's hear your answer."

"Haha, you really need one..."

Zaryusu raised Frost Pain tightly; Zenberu lifted his fists and took a stance; Crusch didn't do anything, as she felt the mana deep within her and prepared to cast her spells any moment.

"I will give you an answer then—fat chance!"

The Skeleton Warriors that judged the reply to be hostile raised their scimitars and shielded their bodies.

“Then die an excruciatingly painful death. You will regret rejecting my final offer of mercy!”

“That’s what I want to say, go back to hell undead! Iguvua!”

At this moment, the battle that would decide the outcome of this war began.

♦ ♦ ♦

“Zaryusu! Get him!”

Zenberu who dashed out faster than anyone else stretched his giant arm and attacked the Skeleton Warrior.

He didn't care when the Skeleton Warrior blocked it with its shield, using brute force to press it back. The shield was dented and the Skeleton Warrior staggering back collided with the other Skeleton Warrior and lost its balance. At the same time, Zenberu used his tail to swipe at another Skeleton Warrior, but missed.

The formation of the Skeleton Warriors was broken and Zaryusu used this chance to slip through.

"Stop him!"

Two Skeleton Warriors slashed at Zaryusu after hearing Iguvua's command.

It was possible for Zaryusu to dodge; he could also use Frost Pain to block if he wanted to. But Zaryusu did neither of these. Dodging would mean he that he would slow down, Zaryusu didn't want to make any unnecessary moves in front of Iguvua.

And more importantly, someone already took care of it—

"「Earth Bind」!"

The earth moved like whips, binding the two Skeletal Warriors. The whips made from mud were like steel chains, restraining the

movement of the two Skeleton Warriors as Zaryusu charged into the gap in their formation.

Precisely—Crusch was present too.

Zaryusu wasn't fighting alone, he just needed to trust his comrades.

Even Crusch's magic couldn't seal off their movements completely. The scimitars of the Skeleton Warriors still grazed Zaryusu. But that was nothing, his boiling blood made him impervious to this pain.

Zaryusu ran with brisk strides.

He charged at Iguvua who was pointing his finger at him. Even if he got hit by a spell, Zaryusu had to endure it and charge at the target. He moved with iron-willed

determination.

“Fools! Know true fear!
「Intimidate」7!”

Zaryusu’s vision shook and he was confused about where he was. A strange unease spread in his heart and he was paranoid about things around him attacking him...

His legs were slowing down to a stop. Zaryusu was shaken mentally due to the effect of the spell 「Intimidate」 and his legs were not responding to him. Even though his mind was telling his legs to move, but his heart was stopping him.

“Zaryusu! 「Lion’s Heart」!”

The moment Crusch shouted, his

fear vanished instantly and his will gushed out from within stronger than before. The magic that granted courage defeated his fear.

Iguvua glared unhappily at Crusch and pointed a finger at her.

“Annoying! 「Lightning」!”

“Hyaa!”

—Crusch screamed.

Zaryusu who started running again was almost consumed by hatred, but got hold of himself in the end. Hatred could be a good weapon sometimes, but in the face of a powerful foe, it could get in the way instead. What he needed when fighting a strong enemy was a fiery heart and an ice-cold mind.

Zaryusu would never turn his head.

Iguvua attacked Crusch just now, but that meant Zaryusu could use this chance to close the distance. Dismay could be seen on Iguvua's face and it knew it made a mistake. This reaction made Zaryusu, whose beloved female was harmed, sneer mockingly.

"Tch! 「Light...”

"Too slow!"

Frost Pain that sliced in from the side knocked away Iguvua's finger.

"Ugh!"

"A warrior has reached you, magic caster! I will let you know your spells are useless now!"

The legendary mages aside, magic casters that were in melee range could be stopped from casting their spells.

Even a powerful undead magic caster like Iguvua was no exception.

Zaryusu narrowed his eyes, he felt something was off. It felt strange when Zaryusu slashed at Iguvua, he must have some defense against physical weapons.

But he wasn't invulnerable. Indeed, if he had resistance against damage, Zaryusu just needed to deal more damage.

What he needed to do was to keep on slashing.

Talking about it was simple, but

actually doing it would be hard. Zaryusu knew that too. But that was the only thing Zaryusu who was a mere warrior could do.

“Don’t look down on me, Lizardman!”

Three arrows of light suddenly flew toward Zaryusu from Iguvua’s body. The arrows of light that appeared without any preparatory actions or signs made Zaryusu block them with his sword on reflex, but the magic arrows went through the weapon and hit Zaryusu’s body, inflicting dull pain.

This was 「Silent Magic: Magic Arrow」. Silent Magic didn’t require any preparatory actions, so it could not be disrupted from being

casted. Not only that, 「Magic Arrow」 was also a type of spell that could not be evaded, so Zaryusu couldn't dodge it either.

Zaryusu gritted his teeth and cleaved at Iguvua with Frost Pain.

"Ughh! Critters! You are just a mere Lizardman!"

「Magic Arrow」 might be unavoidable, but its damage output was low too. For someone who had gone through tough training like Zaryusu, he was not so weak as to be rendered unable to fight from this bit of magic damage.

「Magic Arrow」s struck Zaryusu once again, the pain pierced through his heart and will. Zaryusu

endured the excruciating pain and struck back.

After several exchanges, Zaryusu's movements became dull. The sharp pain prevented him from making agile movements, which was contrasted by the undead that knew no pain.

Iguvua and Zaryusu who understood this point made entirely different expressions.

The weak fell and the strong prevailed, that was the natural law of the world. The result of the one-on-one duel between the two was obvious. But it was also a fact that the unity of the weak gave them a chance to fight on par with the strong.

“「Mid Heal」8!”

Zaryusu’s pain disappeared with this voice and he regained his vitality once again.

The calm Iguvua was angered by the healing spell that came from the back and shouted:

“Damn Lizardmen!”

Zaryusu was fighting together with companions he trusted. Crusch, Zenberu and—

“Rororo... I will not lose!”

“Imbecile... How could I, a creation of the Supreme Ruler lose?! How foolish!”

Iguvua glared at the three

Lizardmen with his venomous eyes. He didn't use any summoning magic as the undead he had summoned earlier were still around. As long as those undead were still around, he could not raise new ones. Hence, Iguvua continued casting 「Silent Magic: Magic Arrow」 while Zaryusu slashed away at Iguvua's body—this monotonous fight kept repeating.

It felt as though this battle would never end.

In that case, the duty of breaking this stalemate rested on the ones behind them. When one side received reinforcements, the match would be settled in an instant.

Both Zaryusu and Iguvua were sure

about that.

Enduring the pain of the lightning attack coursing through her body, Crusch pulled through and casted 「3rd Tier Summon Beast」.

With a dong, a giant crab about 150 cm big appeared—a crab with a large right claw.

It appeared as if it had been waiting under the wetlands the entire time, but it was actually a beast of nature summoned with the 「3rd Tier Summon Beast」 spell.

The beast of nature advanced to Zenberu's side and hammered the Skeleton Warrior with its oversized claw.

Zenberu who received unexpected

reinforcements smiled. For Zenberu who had to endure the attack coming from all sides and protect Crusch, he was glad to receive help.

“Hey! Strange crab! I will leave those two over there to you!”

The crab that acknowledged its duty, the giant crab—Snap Grasp—waved its smaller claw and moved toward the Skeleton Warriors.

‘How should I put this... The situation might be serious...but the two of them are so alike.’

Crusch thought about something she shouldn’t be thinking about at such a moment and smiled. But she stopped her smile immediately and surveyed the battle, regulating her

breathing with deep breaths.

She had been casting defense buffs and healing magic on Rororo when they charged here. She had also casted support buffs on Zenberu, overextending herself.

The consecutive use of spells and the summoning magic on top of that had exhausted Crusch, she couldn't even stand steadily at this point.

She didn't even have the energy to spare to heal herself. Analyzing calmly, Crusch concluded that her worth as a combatant was depreciating and healing herself would be a waste of mana.

Even so, it would make Zaryusu and

Zenberu who were fighting on the front lines uneasy if she were to fall. Blood dripped from the corner of Crusch's lips as she bit the inside of her mouth to keep herself conscious.

"「Mid Heal」!"

The healing spell flew toward Zaryusu who was locked in melee combat with Iguvua.

Her legs lost strength and her vision wavered. She could feel the sensation of water all over her skin.

Crusch couldn't understand what was happening, why and when did she fall into the mud.

But she understood immediately that she didn't suffer new wounds,

so she probably blacked out momentarily.

Crusch was relieved, not because she was still alive, but because she could still fight.

She didn't force herself to stand. No, she didn't have the energy to do so, so she decided to conserve her strength.

In her blurry field of vision, she could see Zaryusu and Zenberu fighting. The backs of her companions during their short time together. Zenberu who was fighting the four skeleton warriors and Zaryusu who was enduring Iguvua's magic attacks were covered with wounds.

Crusch adjusted her breathing and casted her spell.

“「Mid Heal」!”

She cured Zenberu’s injuries.

“「Mid Heal」!”

She healed Zaryusu’s wounds.

“Huff, huff...”

Crusch panted hard.

But her breathing was still rugged, she felt the air wasn’t coming in even though she was breathing so hard.

This was probably the symptoms of mana exhaustion. She felt tremors of a violent headache. Even so,

Crusch worked hard to open her eyes.

They had sacrificed so much for this battle, how could she be the first to retire from the field.

Crusch used all her effort to open her eyes and chanted.

“「Mid Heal」!”

♦ ♦ ♦

Zenberu bashed the skull of a

Skeleton Warrior with his clenched fist. The sensation of him making a slight dent turned into the feeling of the skull shattering. And so, he killed off a Skeleton Warrior.

“That’s the second one. Huff… Hah.”

He expelled the air from his body in an attempt to push the fatigue out along with it, and glared at the remaining Skeleton Warriors. The crab summoned by Crusch was nowhere to be found. Zenberu only managed to defeat the other two thanks to it fending off two enemies.

He only hung on because of Crusch’s support.

Two more to go. After that would be Iguvua.

Flexing his thick right arm, Zenberu confirmed that it could still move.

His left arm was wounded badly and couldn't exert power. Zenberu had used his left arm as a shield a little too eagerly. He stared at his limp right arm.

"Never mind, just think of it as giving them a handicap."

Zenberu glared at his annoying foes. He attempted to move his left arm, but the pain coursing through his body was not what he expected from moving his fingers.

'This is nothing. A comrade continued charging even after its

heads became burdens. I, Zenberu, don't want to be mocked by them.'

Zenberu understood how strong the Skeleton Warriors were after fighting them. Two of them could fight on par with Zenberu. That was how strong they were.

If he took on four at the same time, chances of victory would be slim.

'Thank you, giant crab. I will not eat mud crabs for a long time as thanks.'

After offering thanks to his beloved food, Zenberu turned his killing intent toward the two Skeleton Warriors closing in.

He clenched his fists.

‘I am still standing, I can still fight.’

To be honest, Zenberu was surprised that he could still fight on.

“Stop thinking about foolish things!”

There only needed to be one reason.

Zenberu mocked the past him.

Behind the Skeleton Warriors was Zaryusu’s back. The figure that did not retreat a single step while facing the powerful existence Iguvua.

“That back is really broad…”

Really—.

‘Zaryusu, Crusch and Rororo. We fought together all this time, that’s why I can still go on.’

“Hey hey Zaryusu, you are wounded all over. Aren’t you in worse shape than when you fought me?”

Zenberu sent a Skeleton Warrior flying with his large arm, and used his left arm to block the scimitar of the other Skeleton Warrior.

But he failed to parry the sword, which made another wound in his abdomen. That was the place Crusch had healed with magic.

“Crusch is already shouldering a heavy burden, and now you do this.”

He was healed by Crusch’s healing spell once again and the wound

mended slowly. Zenberu didn't turn to look back, but her voice came from near the water surface. It was easy to imagine what kind of posture she was in while casting the spell. Even so, she didn't stop casting her magic.

"...That's a good woman."

'If I ever get a wife, a woman like that would be great.'

Zenberu who was thinking that felt envious of Zaryusu.

"I don't want to be the first to fall and be the laughing stock."

Feinting with his large arm, he attacked with his tail. Zenberu laughed. 'I am older than those two.'

The two Skeleton Warriors hid their bodies behind shields and closed in. The shields blocked the view of Zaryusu, evoking strong emotions from within Zenberu.

“Don’t block the way! I can’t see the back of that awesome man like this!”

Zenberu roared and charged forth—

♦ ♦ ♦

Iguvua and Zaryusu’s even match

was still continuing. Their faces were reflected in each other's eyes. Zaryusu saw that Iguvua's gaze diverted slightly away from him. The undead poker face of Iguvua suddenly twisted horribly. What happened next froze Zaryusu's mind and body.

He heard the sound of water splashing behind him. Someone fell.

"Look! Your companion is down!"

He couldn't turn back. It might be true, it might be false. Thoughts that made his scales stand on end also surfaced, but the enemy before him had overwhelming strength. He didn't have the luxury of turning his head to find out. The moment he

turned his head, the fight would be over. Zaryusu didn't fight this long just to lose for some stupid reason.

Zaryusu fought to secure victory firmly in his hand.

If Iguvua was telling the truth, it would be bad if he didn't dispose of the enemy reinforcements soon.

Zaryusu was steeling himself to take the next magic attack when he heard the sound of someone getting up from the water and bones cracking.

"Zaryusu! We settled this side! The rest—is up to you!!"

"「Mid Heal」!"

Zenberu roared in great pain and

the sound of him falling into the water reached Zaryusu.

The moment Crusch's hoarse voice was heard, Zaryusu's wounds got mended.

"Muu—!"

Displeasure creased Iguvua's face. Without looking back, Zaryusu knew the two of them completed their tasks perfectly. What was left was—

"My turn!"

Iguvua used his staff to parry Frost Pain that was coming at him.

"Kukuku... I am the Lich Iguvua, don't look down on me just because I am not proficient in melee

combat!”

Although he said that, Iguvua could tell his chances of winning were low.

In a one-on-one fight, Iguvua could win with superior physical attributes. But the white Lizardman behind kept healing the Lizardman before him, turning the tables in terms of health left.

Only one out of three blows was deflected. The other two tore at Iguvua’s body. Even though he had resistance toward slashing weapons like skeletons and the additional ice damage was negated, the situation was dire.

Iguvua was panicking.

‘I am the creation of the Supreme Ruler Ainz Ooal Gown, the commander of this army. I cannot fail!’

He wanted to summon undead soldiers to act as meat shields, but Iguvua would be attacked whenever he tried to cast spells. It was tough to do so with an enemy right before his eyes.

He would lose if this went on.

Iguvua decided to show his final hand. It wasn’t a great plan— Depending on the circumstances, this might doom him, but that was the only choice he had left.

He suddenly turned around and ran. While Zaryusu was surprised, but

he still took the chance to cleave at Iguvua's back. Iguvua who took a hit on the back staggered, but did not fall. Zaryusu clicked his tongue at Iguvua's seemingly endless health, and sprinted to catch up with Iguvua who was pulling away.

Iguvua turned back to show his undead face filled with wrath, but seemed to be elated about something.

A red sphere of light appeared in Iguvua's hand. It was 「Fireball」.

'Using a wide-area spell at such a range? He wants to kill himself— No!'

Realizing Iguvua wasn't looking at him, Zaryusu was filled with fear.

Iguvua was looking behind Zaryusu. He was focusing on Crusch and Zenberu who were lying on the ground.

‘—What should I do!?’

Zaryusu thought frantically.

This was a major lapse. He could give Iguvua the final blow by sacrificing the both of them. If he didn’t do that, there would be no telling how the battle would turn. With both parties low on health, any mistake would be fatal.

To defeat Iguvua—Didn’t they fight through all this while in order to do that? So many Lizardmen had given their lives for this goal.

Then he should sacrifice the two of

them. They would definitely forgive him with a smile. If he was in their shoes, Zaryusu would want the other party to do so too.

—Even so.

Zaryusu wasn't someone who would abandon the comrades fighting alongside him.

Only one way was left—save the two of them and then destroy Iguvua.

Things were simple once he made up his mind.

"— 「Icy Burst」!"

Zaryusu created a barrier of cold air on the ground near his feet.

"Gaarrgghh!"

Zaryusu's body was chilled by the cold air bursting forth, pain that could only be described as intense spread through his entire being.

He glared at Iguvua with sharp eyes even though he was about to lose consciousness. Zaryusu endured this numbing pain.

He couldn't help but scream despite his best efforts as the cold fog dominated the surroundings.

The white cold air covered everything and Iguvua laughed sinisterly when his scheme succeeded.

'Kuku, you could have won if you had abandoned your comrades.'

Iguvua was completely immune to

cold and electricity. He who was totally fine inside the cold gush of air that crushed the 「Fireball」 spell in his hands. If he casted it, it would collide with the white fog around Iguvua and cause an explosion.

He could deal the final blow to the other two after the fog dissipated. More importantly, he needed to put down the Lizardman that was still standing. As he looked around, Iguvua's face scowled. He miscalculated something.

"Well then, where is he?"

This was a fog that concealed everything from sight.

Iguvua had the ability to see

through the darkness with his eyes, but couldn't see through objects that obscured his sight like this. He had no idea where the enemy was.

But that wasn't a big problem. With how the Lizardman was shrieking just now, he seemed to have suffered great injuries. He shot out the cold air to counter the 「Fireball」, so he must have suffered damage on the same level as taking a 「Fireball」 hit.

Suffering this injury on top of his already heavy wounds, it might have been fatal. What was left was to crush him slowly.

Should he leave this foggy place first?

After considering it, Iguvua decided not to.

—If he moved now, he would be giving his position away.

The important thing was to summon undead guards. With a meat shield, victory would be his even if that Lizardman was still alive.

Iguvua who was about to cast his spell heard the sound of water rippling.

—One of the four treasures of the Lizardmen, Frost Pain.

A weapon made from ice extracted from the lake when it froze that one and only time. It harbored three magical powers.

Number one, the sword was imbued with cold energy, dealing additional ice damage to the enemy it attacked.

Number two, the powerful skill that could only be used thrice a day, 「Icy Burst」.

Number three—

The sound of air being sliced echoed out.

Before understanding what was happening, Iguvua saw the tip of a sharp object.

Iguvua's head was hit by a powerful strike.

The sword lodged into Iguvua's right eye rattled wildly. Iguvua who

finally understood what was happening screamed.

“Hyaaa! Why! Why are you not dead!?”

Frost Pain pierced deep into Iguvua’s right eye socket, he could feel his health falling drastically—

In front of Iguvua who was standing unsteadily with a sword lodged in his head was Zaryusu who was covered in frost.

Iguvua couldn’t understand why Zaryusu was still standing after taking such a powerful ice attack.

The third ability of Frost Pain.

Granting the user with resistance to ice damage—

Even though Frost Pain offered resistance to the cold, it couldn't completely negate a powerful skill like 「Icy Burst」. The damage from the cold chilled Zaryusu to the bones. He was on the verge of collapsing, his breathing was ragged and his movement dulled. His tail drooped weakly into the water. It was almost impossible to fight on when you even had difficulty just breathing. That strike wasn't aimed carefully, but a blow thrown out by instinct using all his might.

It was a lucky hit.

Zaryusu struggled to keep his eyes open.

He gave everything he had to deal

this final blow to Iguvua, and he could feel that it was a fatal hit.

Zaryusu who had no energy left to fight looked at Iguvua with a glimmer of hope.

Iguvua was wavering. He couldn't keep his body intact as the skin fell off his face and cracks appeared on his bones. Even his clothes were rotting away. It was a matter of time before he would fade away. The moment Zaryusu was certain he was victorious—

A bony hand covered in skin grabbed Zaryusu's throat.

"I...I am created to serve the Supreme Ruler... How could I be...vanquished like this!"

Iguvua wasn't even holding him with much force and Zaryusu could break free easily, but—

"—Ahhhh—!"

—Zaryusu wailed as an intense pain permeated his entire body.

Negative energy flowed into Zaryusu's body, robbing him of his vitality. Even Zaryusu who was trained to endure pain couldn't withstand the feeling of the pain caused by the cold that seemed to be injected directly into his veins.

"Die—! Lizardman!"

Pieces of Iguvua's face had dropped off, disintegrating in midair.

Iguvua's life was deteriorating as

well, but his intense loyalty towards his master made him cling onto life desperately.

Zaryusu was struggling with all he had, but he was overcome with fear as his body refused to move as he wished.

Zaryusu didn't have much health left. The negative energy Iguvua was injecting into him was draining his life force away.

Zaryusu's gaze wavered and his vision blurred.

The world seemed to be covered by a thin fog.

Iguvua who was clinging to consciousness mightily had a victorious smile as he watched

Zaryusu slowly lose his strength to struggle.

Kill this Lizardman, as well as the other two behind him. They should be the elite of the Lizardmen.

Killing these Lizardmen would be the best gifts he could offer to the Supreme Ruler—his creator.

Iguvua's expression was depicting these emotions strongly without words, allowing Zaryusu to surmise what Iguvua was thinking.

"Go to hell!"

His body was not reacting to him as he could feel his body temperature dropping as if a poison was spreading through his body. He could hardly breathe, and his mind

was the only thing that was clear.

He couldn't die yet.

Rororo who sprinted with all its might.

Zenberu who shielded him.

Crusch who exhausted all her mana.

Not just them, he was also shouldering the burdens of all the Lizardmen who had sacrificed themselves in this war.

Zaryusu who was racking his brains for a way out heard a whisper.

—The gentle voice of Crusch

—The hearty voice of Zenberu

—The playful whimpers of Rororo

Sounds that should be impossible for him to hear.

Crusch had lost consciousness and Zenberu should be knocked out.

Rororo should had been taken far away from here.

Was Zaryusu hearing things as he was losing consciousness? Imagining the voices of the comrades he knew for less than a week? The call of his family?

No.

Indeed, this line of thinking was wrong.

Everyone was here with him—

“—Ahhhh… Ahhhhhh—!”

“—? You still have this much strength left?!”

Zaryusu who was on the verge of losing his consciousness roared and the surprised voice of Iguvua could be heard.

Zaryusu moved his eyeballs and glared at Iguvua. His eyes were filled with indomitable will, making it hard to believe that his eyes were unfocused just moments earlier, stiffening Iguvua’s expression.

“Crusch! Zenberu! Rororo!”

“—! What are you doing! Just die—!”

Where did such vitality stem from? The huge amount of negative

energy injected into Zaryusu was draining his life force constantly. Zaryusu also felt that his limbs were heavy and his body ice-cold.

Even so, Zaryusu felt warmer with every name he shouted. This warmth didn't originate from his life force.

It came from within his chest—his heart.

The sound of muscle tensing erupted. It came from Zaryusu's right arm, his clenched fist. He was gathering all the strength he had left in it right now.

"Impossible—! How can you still move! You monster—!"

The scene of Zaryusu still moving

despite all that was incredulous.

Heated emotions appeared in Iguvua's mind, but he suppressed them.

He was Iguvua, the field commander of the Great Tomb of Nazarick's army. And more importantly, he was an undead created by the great king of death—Ainz Ooal Gown.

He could not permit his powerful self to lose this fight—

"Die—!"

"It's over you monster!"

Zaryusu was a step faster.

Indeed, his strike with all his might

was an instant faster than Iguvua's injection of negative energy—

The tightly clenched fist hit the hilt of Frost Pain—

Zaryusu's fist bled. After taking such a heavy blow, Frost Pain that was lodged into the left eye pierced all the way through Iguvua's brain.

"Oooowwwwww!!"

Iguvua was an undead that couldn't feel pain, but—he could still feel his negative life dissipating.

"This...this...impossible...Ainz...sama..."

Iguvua's eyes reflected his understanding of what failure was. When Zaryusu's body fell like a puppet with its strings cut, a huge

splash could be heard—

"...Please... Please... Forgive...me..."

Iguvua's body fell as he apologized to his master.

♦ ♦ ♦

The room was silent. The scene reflected in the mirror was unbelievable and no one said a word. Except for the maid—Entoma.

"Cocytus-sama, Ainz-sama has

summoned you.”

“—Understood.”

Cocytus who had lowered his head turned slowly to face Entoma.

Basked in the worried gaze of his subordinates, he gritted his teeth in shame.

At the same time, he wanted to compliment the Lizardmen.

A magnificent battle.

They turned the impossible possible and achieved a turnabout victory. The Lich did have some lapses, but it was more than capable of winning the battle despite that.

“...Spectacular. Absolutely

spectacular."

Cocytus kept repeating this phrase which reflected how he actually felt.

The Lizardmen overcame this huge obstacle.

"...A pity."

Cocytus sighed as he watched the Lizardmen cheering and dancing in celebration.

The warriors reflected in the mirror might be weak, but it stimulated Cocytus's fighting spirit.

"Ah... What a pity..."

Cocytus hesitated. He picked the worst scenario he could think of, thought about it and made his

conclusion.

“—Let us be off.”

Part 6

Zaryusu felt his body being lifted out from the darkness, it was really comfortable.

Opening his eyes, a blurry world greeted him, similar to the one he saw whenever he woke up.

‘Where am I? Why am I sleeping here?’

He had many questions, and at the same time realized a weight pressing down on him.

‘—White.’

Zaryusu stared at that white color, it was the first word that came to mind in his sleepy mind. As he became more awake, he understood what it was.

It was Crusch. She was sleeping on top of him.

“Ah...”

‘I survived.’

Zaryusu felt relieved and almost said that out loud, but held it in. He couldn’t bear waking Crusch who was still sleeping, suppressing his urge to touch her. Even though her scales were beautiful, he couldn’t caress the scales of a female Lizardman so thoughtlessly.

Zaryusu pushed the thought of

Crusch out of his mind and thought about other things.

There were many things he needed to consider.

First of all, why was he here.

Searching his memory, he tried recalling what happened. After seeing the destruction of Iguvua, his consciousness was cut off. He wasn't captured and was still lying here, meaning his tribe probably won the war.

To avoid waking Crusch, Zaryusu sighed softly. He felt the burden he shouldered recently lightened. But thinking over it calmly, there were still some worries. They still didn't know about the enemy or what

their goal was, there was a high chance their foes would strike again... No, they would definitely do so.

He allowed his mind to rest. Zaryusu felt the warmth from Crusch's body and sighed again.

After this, Zaryusu lightly moved his body. His entire body could move with no problems. He thought he might be maimed, but luckily he was fine.

Zaryusu remembered his brothers in arms. Aside from Crusch, there was nobody else here. What happened to Zenberu? He was uneasy, but was quite sure a powerful Lizardman like Zenberu would be fine.

Crusch seemed to awaken by Zaryusu's movement and stirred, as if a soul had been injected into her supple body. She should be waking soon.

"Hmm..."

Crusch made a cute sound and moved her dazed eyes to look around her. Shortly after, she noticed Zaryusu under her and smiled happily.

"Muu—"

Crusch who was still half asleep hugged Zaryusu and grinded against him. Just like an animal wanting to leave her scent behind.

Zaryusu stiffened, allowing Crusch to grind as she pleased. An evil

thought ‘I didn’t do anything’ surfaced from a corner of his mind.

The white and smooth scales were smooth and comfortable, emitting an alluring fragrance of herbs.

‘It should be fine to hug her back right?’

When he couldn’t stand it any longer, Crusch’s eyes focused and looked at Zaryusu right in the eye.

—And froze instantly.

Facing Crusch who didn’t move while hugging him, Zaryusu wondered what he should say. In the end, he chose something he thought would not be a problem.

“—Can I hug you too?”

It only seemed okay because his heated passion got into his head.

Crusch made an intimidating cry and her tail thrashed around. She then rolled away from Zaryusu until she hit the wall.

He could hear Crusch who was lying prone saying ‘Stupid, stupid, I am stupid’.

“...Well, I am glad you are safe, Crusch.”

These words allowed Crusch to regain her composure—but her tail still kept on thrashing about—
Lifting her head, she smiled at Zaryusu.

“You too, it’s great that you are fine.”

Seeing Crusch's gentle face, Zaryusu had lewd thoughts, but suppressed them and asked a proper question.

"Do you know what happened after I blacked out?"

"Yeah, more or less. After you defeated Iguvua, the enemy retreated. Your brother also defeated the monsters and saved the three of us... That was yesterday."

"Zenberu isn't here..."

"He is fine. He had stronger recovery speed than you and regained consciousness after receiving healing spells. He should be settling the aftermath of the

battle. I seemed to have blacked out from exhaustion after hearing all that…”

Crusch got up and sat down beside Zaryusu. Zaryusu wanted to get up too, but Crusch stopped him.

“Don’t push yourself, you have the most serious injuries out of us all.”

She was probably recalling the scene that time as her voice grew softer.

“It’s great that you are okay, really great…”

Zaryusu caressed Crusch who was looking down and consoled her.

“I will not die before hearing your answer. I am worried about you

too."

Answer. This term stopped their movements.

They didn't say anything as the room fell into darkness, their heartbeats almost seemed to be audible.

Crusch moved her tail slowly, tangling Zaryusu's tail. The black and white tail entangling together looked just like two snakes mating.

Zaryusu looked at Crusch quietly, and Crusch was looking at him too, their reflections could be seen in each other's eyes.

Zaryusu uttered something softly. No, they weren't words, but a cry. It was the cry he uttered when he first

met Crusch.

—A mating call.

Zaryusu didn't do anything after the cry. No, he couldn't do anything except let his heart beat intensely.

Moments later, Crusch made the same sound—a cry. The same emotional cry while shaking her tail, that was—the cry to accept the mating call.

An indescribably seductive expression appeared on Crusch's face, Zaryusu could no longer pull his eyes away from Crusch. Crusch pushed herself onto Zaryusu, the position was similar to the one they had while sleeping.

There was almost no distance

between their faces, their warm breathing mixed together, their heartbeats synchronized through their chests that were touching, and two of them became one—

“Oh! Getting busy!?”

The door was opened roughly and Zenberu charged in.

Crusch and Zaryusu froze like ice sculptures.

Zenberu looked at the two of them in confusion—at Crusch who was riding on Zaryusu. He tilted his head and asked.

“What, you haven’t started yet?”

They understood what Zenberu was saying and silently moved away

from each other and stood up, approaching Zenberu without a word.

Zenberu looked down at the two of them, confused, and leaned forward.

“—Gahhhh!”

He took two punches to the stomach. After exhaling, Zenberu’s giant body collapsed onto the floor.

“Wooo... What powerful punches...especially Crusch... Gahh...that really hurts...”

Leaving Zaryusu aside, the punch of wrath from the female Lizardman could even win against Zenberu. That wasn’t enough to vent their anger, but no matter how much

they beat Zenberu up, that atmosphere would never come back.

They held each other's hands—It was a strange substitute for beating Zenberu up. Zaryusu asked Zenberu one thing to ease his worries.

"Forget about that for now, I have questions for you. I heard some of it from Crusch, but could you tell me what is the situation right now?"

Zenberu didn't care about the two of them holding hands and answered:

"Don't you know? All the tribes are having a victory party."

"My older brother is hosting the

party?"

"That's right. Anyway, the hunters scouted the region and did not find any signs of the enemy, and no traces of reinforcements or ambush. It would be difficult to hide such a large army. We are still on alert, but your brother has already declared victory. I am here on your brother's orders."

"My brother's orders?"

"Yes, your brother said—'Shahaha, just let the two of them sleep together. They might already be getting it on, shahaha. It's a bit embarrassing to interrupt, but I am curious, shahaha'."

"Don't bullshit! What's with the

‘shahaha’?”

“Oh… There wasn’t any ‘shahaha’…”

“There’s no way my brother would laugh like that, really…”

“I am just expressing it more vividly…”

“—You are the worst.”

A chill that could match 「Icy Burst」 came out from Crusch’s mouth along with these words. That frightening voice even gave Zaryusu goosebumps. Zenberu who was being lectured shivered and stiffened.

“So, why are you here?”

“Ermm, I am here to disrupt…”

“If you dare say you are here to be the third wheel, I will let you taste all the magic that you can think of.”

Zaryusu and Zenberu were pretty sure that Crusch wasn’t joking.

“Eh… I am here to invite you guys to join the party. We are the key figures in this victory, right? We can’t miss the party. And we need to discuss about the future of the Lizardmen too…”

“I see…”

After hearing Zenberu’s roundabout explanation, Zaryusu smiled wryly after catching on what he wanted to say. Zenberu meant to say: There might be another battle,

now was the time to display their strength.

“I got it, are you going too, Crusch?”

The unhappy Crusch puffed her cheeks, looking just like a Delmas frog residing in the wetlands. But Zaryusu thought she was much cuter.

“So, are we going?”

Zenberu casually asked Zaryusu and Crusch who were looking into each other’s eyes.

“Ah... Yeah, you are right, let’s go.”

After the two of them acknowledged, the trio walked out together. When they walked down the stairs and stepped into the

wetlands, Zaryusu suddenly disappeared from Crusch and Zenberu's view. Something large suddenly knocked Zaryusu down.

—Bang voom voom splash.

That was roughly how it sounded like.

Zaryusu disappeared from their view, and was replaced by Rororo's figure. Its four heads twisted around energetically, pushing their noses at Zaryusu who had fallen into the wetlands.

"Rororo! You are alright!"

Zaryusu who was covered in mud stood and walked up to Rororo, gently caressing its body and observed it. It seemed to have

received magical treatment, all its burn wounds from before had been healed, it was as if it was never hurt in the first place.

Rororo whimpered as it entangled Zaryusu with all of its heads, almost covering Zaryusu completely in its tight embrace.

“Hey hey hey, stop that, Rororo.”

Zaryusu laughed as he restrained Rororo with his voice. Rororo only cried happily, but didn’t let go.

Splash splash splash.

Zaryusu suddenly heard this rhythmic sound of water splashes, and was baffled when he found the source.

It was Crusch. She was watching Zaryusu and Rororo with a gentle smile, but her tail was hitting the wetlands with a fixed rhythm.

Zenberu who was standing beside Crusch shuffled away slowly with a stiff expression.

Rororo stopped moving too. It probably sensed that something was wrong.

“What is it?”

“No, it’s nothing...”

Zaryusu looked at Crusch who asked him the question and was confused. No matter how he looked at it, Crusch was smiling and happy that Zaryusu and Rororo were reunited. But somehow, it gave him

a chilling feeling.

“How strange—“

Crusch smiled again.

Rororo released Zaryusu and he regained his freedom. Zenberu seemed to be fearful of something. Zenberu probably couldn’t stand this strange atmosphere anymore and changed the topic in a hurry.

“Alright Rororo, you and I will move on ahead.”

Of course, Rororo couldn’t understand the language of the Lizardmen, but it obediently allowed Zenberu to mount it and ran off with amazing speed.

After those two had left, a strange

atmosphere fell between Zaryusu and Crusch.

Crusch hugged her head as she shookd it.

“Ah~ really, what am I doing. It feels like my heart isn’t my own. Even though it is irrational, I couldn’t help myself. This is like a curse.”

Zaryusu understood how she felt. Because he felt the same way when he met Crusch for the first time too.

“To be honest, Crusch—I am very happy.”

“—What!?”

Splash, a loud sound of water

erupted. Zaryusu then moved to Crusch's side.

"Listen, can you hear it?"

"Hmmm?"

"The things we successfully defended are also the things we have to protect from now on."

Sounds of rowdy laughter were carried here with the wind, they should be holding a banquet right now. The banquet was meant to bid farewell to the ancestors, celebrate their victory and to mourn the dead.

Wine was originally an expensive luxury. But they managed to have several banquets thanks to Zenberu's tribe bringing one of the four treasures that supplied

unlimited wine. And because all of the tribes were gathered here, they could enjoy this unbelievably joyous atmosphere.

Zaryusu listened to the joyous cheers and said to Crusch with a smile:

“This might not be over yet, that Supreme One person might still attack, but even so...we should relax for today.”

Zaryusu then put his hands on Crusch’s waist.

Crusch followed the flow and stuck onto Zaryusu, resting her head on Zaryusu’s shoulder.

“Shall we go?”

“Yeah…” Crusch answered and after hesitating for a moment, she called out: “…My darling.”

The two Lizardmen walked together, disappearing into the noisy crowd—

Chapter 4: Dawn of Despair

Part 1

Cocytus treaded with extremely

heavy footsteps towards the Throne Room. As if they were affected by a contagion, the servants following behind him likewise had footsteps which were slow and heavy.

The reason for these heavy footsteps was because of the defeat they had swallowed as a result of the war against the Lizardmen. As the commander of the glorious Nazarick army, he had allowed failure to stain its reputation.

Sure, being created as a warrior, Cocytus himself held a lot of respect for outstanding warriors like the Lizardmen.

However, this was a completely different matter.

Nazarick did not tolerate failure. Furthermore, this instance was not a defensive battle like those in the past, but was the first expedition. Anyone who was decorated with defeat in their first battle could not possibly be in a positive mood.

Recalling Demiurge's words, the army assigned to this task had been weak indeed, but that was just an excuse. Even if there was a possibility his master planned for the expedition to fail from the very beginning.

Eventually, the Throne Room lay ahead, and the room just before it, called《Solomon's Gate》, was already within eyesight. As such, the closer they came, the heavier their footsteps became, as if they

were under the influence of some kind of magic effect.

Even if he were to be blamed by the master, it would not matter. Even if he were to be killed, or ordered to commit suicide, he had already mentally prepared himself for any action necessary in order to wash off this shame.

What Cocytus feared the most, was disappointing his master.

If the last remaining Supreme Ruler were to abandon him, what would he do?

Cocytus thought of himself as a sword, one which was in the hands of the master and would obediently slice anything when ordered. That

was why, being considered useless or ineffective by the master was the most terrifying.

Not only that, if the other Guardians were to be given up on for the sake of shared responsibility, Cocytus would not know how to face them.

‘There is no way this will be forgiven, if it turns out to be severe to that degree. Even if I were to offer up my life, it would still not be enough for forgiveness.’

Furthermore...

‘If the Master became disappointed because of this, and left this place just like the other Supreme Rulers, what then...?’

Cocytus shuddered. Being someone who had complete immunity to the cold, the cause of the shudder was of course not from external factors but from within. He was under such considerable mental stress and torment that, if he were human, he would have easily been at the brink of puking.

‘No, that will not happen. Ainz-sama definitely cannot...give up on us.’

The last Supreme Ruler in this great tomb, where all the others had already left.

Even if he was the individual of highest authority, he was also everybody’s supporting pillar.

‘Therefore, how could such a kind-hearted liege give up on us’—he comforted himself with these words, but deep down, he still harbored some uncertainty over events to transpire which could not possibly happen.

They arrived at Solomon’s Gate.

Normally, apart from the golems and crystal monsters which guarded the surroundings, this room would be devoid of any person. Right now, however, there were many figures. Specifically, there were four Floor Guardians—Demiurge, Aura, Mare and Shalltear. In addition, the four had brought along their chosen highest ranking servants.

The spectators all had their eyes on

Cocytus. Guilt allowed a look of panic to momentarily flash across his face.

Because he felt that everyone was pointing the finger of blame on his failure. No, Cocytus felt that perhaps everyone was blaming themselves. His thoughts from before once again crossed his mind. Would everybody harbor the same kind of thoughts?

Looking closer, he saw that self-blame was silently floating in everybody's eyes.

"My apologies, I have arrived late. Even Demiurge who was outside arrived earlier than I did."

"Not at all, not at all. No need to

apologize for such a small matter."

Demiurge replied on behalf of everybody.

His voice was no different from his usual tone, with no negative emotions detectable. However, Demiurge was a Guardian specialized in strategy, extensive control of emotions and concealing inner thoughts, therefore it was impossible to determine whether or not he felt any displeasure.

Therefore when taking this into account, Demiurge's earlier outburst during his observation of the fight between Ainz and Shalltear was a rare sight. Although, that display also went to show how much of a loyal heart he possessed.

“The other Guardians have already been informed of the matter. This time let me substitute for Albedo as the representative of the Guardians, does anyone else have anything they wish to discuss regarding this?”

“No, there are no issues with you taking on this responsibility.”

Albedo was currently substituting Sebas’s role in serving the master, and as such was not on site.

“That’s great. Then, after the final person has arrived, let us head to the Throne Room together. However, since Albedo is not present, I would like to first discuss the order in which we are to pay homage. Ordinarily we would have

a practice beforehand, but we have no time for that, therefore we shall omit it this time. There will only be verbal instruction, therefore listen carefully everybody."

Each Guardian and servant expressed their understanding. Cocytus, who had similarly responded, did have one query. All of the Guardians were already present, therefore who were they waiting for?

However, that person's arrival immediately answered his question.

Cocytus suddenly detected a living being headed toward this place.

Looking in that direction, he discovered an alien-shaped creature

floating in midair heading straight towards Solomon's Gate.

The outer appearance was that of a fetus. No, it would be better described as an embryo. It had a tail and its body was an extremely bright pink color. Above its head was a halo and on its back was a pair of featherless stick-like wings. This alien was roughly one meter in size, and was slowly moving forward.

"That is?"

Demiurge replied to Aura's question.

"This is Victim, Guardian of the 8th Floor."

"So that is Victim..."

Victim turned a circle after arriving at Solomon's Gate. Cocytus felt that he was surveying the surroundings.

Victim did not have a neck, therefore to survey his surroundings it was necessary for him to turn his entire body.

"Uoy tresed dna dnuora nur annog reven ,nwod uoy tel annog reven ,pu uoy evig annog reven [How do you do, I am Victim]."9

Demiurge was completely unfazed by Victim's strange method of speaking, and responded on behalf of everybody:

"Welcome, Victim. I am Demiurge, substituting as representative for Albedo for the first time."

“ssa latem ynihs ym etiB [I have heard about this matter from Ainz-sama].”

After speaking, Victim turned his body one full circle and once again sized everyone up.

“smaeb leets tlem t’nac leuf teJ [I have also heard about everybody’s reputation, therefore let us kindly spare with introducing ourselves].”

“I see, understood. Then since everybody has arrived, let us clarify what we were discussing earlier.”

Everybody listened attentively to Demiurge’s explanation, because in a moment they would be paying a visit to Ainz-sama, the integration of all of the Supreme Rulers, at the

core of the Great Tomb of Nazarick's heart. If there was even a slight mistake, surely the only acceptable apology would be through death.

After the explanation and a quick moment for everyone to digest what was said, under Demiurge's lead the Guardians brought along their servants and entered the Throne Room.

As they entered, Cocytus, who had only been in this room a handful of times before, felt incomparable joy.

Exquisite architecture, as well as the flags representing the Supreme Rulers, and also the World-class items placed in the deepest part of the room. This room was truly

worthy of being hailed as the heart of Nazarick. It was an eye-catching sight, causing any person to momentarily forget their internal torments.

The Guardians left their servants behind along the way and assembled themselves in a row as they arrived before the steps below the throne. Following this, they faced the guild symbol of Ainz Ooal Gown hung on the wall and saluted, expressing their own respect and loyalty.

Afterward, they all got down and knelt on one knee, with their heads inclined downward, and silently awaited for their master to arrive.

Before long, the heavy sound of

doors being opened resounded from behind, and single pair of footsteps was heard entering into the large room. Without having to look backwards, they knew that those footsteps did not belong to their master, because the master of the Great Tomb of Nazarick could not possibly make his entrance by himself.

“All hail the arrival of the most Supreme Ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, Ainz Ooal Gown-sama, and also Overseer of the Guardians, Albedo-sama.”

It was battle maid Yuri Alpha’s voice.

Once again the doors made a sound as they were opened, bringing along

the crisp sound made by shoes and the repeated sound of a staff striking the floor. From behind those sounds there was also the sound made by someone walking in high-heels.

In general, when the master entered a room, those inside ought to bow in order to demonstrate their sincere respect, but then everybody at the scene did not make any salute at all. This was because they had long already demonstrated their most sincere respects.

However, only Cocytus was different.

Being completely occupied with his internal anxiety caused him to involuntarily make an external

movement. The movement was actually extremely slight, but in this kind of situation it had a great impact on the atmosphere.

Through a special ability, Cocytus detected that the other Guardians had directed their attentions toward him. Despite working hard to suppress her anger, Albedo, who was walking behind the master, failed to conceal it. However, in this kind of situation, nobody dared to speak out.

The footsteps slowly passed by the row of Guardians, and the sound of stairs being climbed and the throne being sat on could be heard. After this, Albedo's voice loudly rang out in the room.

“Everybody please raise your heads to gaze upon the noble presence of Ainz Ooal Gown-sama.”

All of the spectators simultaneously raised their heads to look at the master who was seated on the throne, their movements producing a brushing sound made by friction.

Cocytus also raised his head immediately.

With the staff clasped in his hand symbolizing the status of a ruler, an eerily frightening aura wrapped around his entire body, and exuding mysterious dark rays from behind his back, this was indeed the Supreme Ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick—Ainz Ooal Gown.

After Albedo, who was standing beside Ainz, inspected all of the Guardians at the foot of the stairs including Cocytus, she nodded in satisfaction then turned to face Ainz.

“Ainz-sama, the Guardians of Nazarick have all gathered before you. Please give us our commands.”

After Ainz gave a low ‘Un’ sound of agreement, he struck the ground heavily with the staff in his hand. This attracted the gazes of everybody, and he slowly opened his mouth to speak:

“Welcome, all of you Guardians before me. First, allow me to express my thanks. Demiurge!”

“Yes!”

“Every time an issue arises, you get called upon. You’ve worked hard, thank you for your dedication.”

“Oh, oh, your words are too kind, Ainz-sama! I am your servant, therefore when called upon I must of course immediately respond duly. This is to be expected.”

Demiurge was delighted to the point that he was slightly shaking as he made a deep bow.

“Is that so. Right, have any suspicious individuals appeared on your side?”

“None. I have taken special care in my preparations. If any person gets close, he or she should be very easy

to detect…”

“…That is good. However, above everything else you must not slip into laxity during the preparations. This is because the opponent may have some methods inconceivable to us. Apart from that, the skin that you have given to me…according to the conclusion of the Chief Librarian, this can be used to manufacture low-rank scrolls. Is there a method to provide a steady supply of such?”

“Yes! There will be no problems at all. We have already accumulated a relatively adequate amount.”

“I see…then, what is the name of the wild beast?”

“Wild beast? ...Ha! About the kind of creature that Ainz-sama is referring to...”

Demiurge deliberated for a brief moment, then continued with his reply.

“They are two-legged sheep from the Theocracy. How would you feel about naming them Bellion sheep?”

Demiurge’s elated tone caused some confusion in Cocytus. Basically, Demiurge was a good-tempered, even gentle, person. However, he was only like this to his comrades who were likewise created by Supreme Rulers. To others, he was an extremely cruel person.

Under his superficial display of good mood, it was possible to have a brief glimpse of his cruel personality. Although Demiurge's deep malice was directed toward the wild beasts which were the topic of discussion earlier, would he use such an attitude to talk about beings which lacked sentience?

Judging on the basis of Demiurge's personality, something felt out of place. However, the current situation rendered it inappropriate to raise this issue with him.

"So that's what it is...sheep."

Ainz's words carried a slightly pleased intonation, causing Demiurge and Albedo to break into smiles.

“Although I would prefer to call them mountain goats...but that name is also satisfactory. Well then, please continue to graft those sheep for their skin...will excessive capturing have an impact on the ecosystem?”

“There should not be. Furthermore, with just the use of healing magic, we are able to immediately repeat the grafting process. That is why as long as the supply required to be produced is not large, it will not be necessary to carry out a large-scale capture. All of this is the result of our outstanding tormentor’s hard work.”

“Eh? If healing magic is used, won’t the part that was cut off disappear?”

“About this issue...there is one thing that we now understand through our healing experiments. If, before we apply healing magic, we merely allow that part to undergo a significant change in shape—for example mincing the flesh—then that fleshy body will effectively be preserved. That means to say, if magic is cast after the skin has been removed, healing magic will effectively recognize it as a foreign entity, therefore it will not disappear even when healing magic is applied. This is also the reason why they would not die starved even if they ate the meat. In addition, although this may count as outside the topic, if one aspect of healing magic is rejected by another aspect of healing magic, sometimes it is as if it cannot operate smoothly

and results in a scar. Likewise, the lower the rank, the more likely it is that scars will form due to time lapse."

"So that's how it is...magic is powerful...very well, continue with your progress."

"As you command. Henceforth I will proceed with conducting trials according to age and gender. With time, I feel that I will know whether or not a certain species of a certain age's skin is the most suitable."

"Regarding this... hand the responsibility of this part over to the Chief Librarian. Victim is next."

"snaem ti kniht uoy tahw snaem ti kniht ton od I .drow taht gnisu peek

uoY [Yes, Ainz-sama].”

“There is only one reason for summoning you here. If an inconceivable event were to occur, your special skill will be required for the protection of me and the other Guardians...sorry about that. I promise that I will immediately assist with your reincarnation, my apologies in advance.”

“siht naht reggib semit eerht ...tsael ta eb ot sah gnidliub ehT ?stna rof retnec A ?siht si tahW [Demiurge had already told me, please do not worry, Ainz-sama. I am also the servant of Ainz-sama. Furthermore, my death is my raison d’être. If this modest ability of mine is able to assist the Supreme Ruler, I would be joyful beyond compare].”

“Is that so…please forgive me.”

Seeing the Supreme Ruler lower his head, Victim exclaimed:

“sihT ekaT !enolA oG oT suoregnaD s’tI [This humble one would not dare!]”

“When encountering an extraordinary situation, in order to prevent the opponent from escaping we may even have to kill you. Even if you are cooperative after accepting this, we would like you to know that we won’t be killing you because of anything personal. Although you are also one of my precious children, and I wish not to cause you any harm, if we allow an enemy we do not fully comprehend to escape, we may

experience a disastrous end, that is why...”

“tihs suoires emos ees annog er’uoy ...ruoh rep selim 88 stih ybab siht nehw ,tcerroc era snoitaluclac ym fI [Please say no more, Ainz-sama. I fully understand your feelings].”

“In Nazarick, some mechanisms are used by uttering a single phrase. Although it is borrowed from the Gospel, that phrase is 「Giving up one’s life for friends is the greatest love of all」. This phrase directly refers to you; thank you for your love.”

Ainz’s gaze shifted from the Guardian who would die for his loyalty to the other Guardians.

“Next is Shalltear.”

Not expecting to be called upon, Shalltear’s shoulders gave a startled jump, and her response was in an abnormally high-pitched voice.

“Yes...Yes!”

“...Come over here.”

Because unlike the other Guardians, only she was called to the master’s side, Shalltear was surprised and stood up in a flurry of panic. From her back, one could see that she was evidently unsettled, similar to someone who was about to be sent up to the chopping block. However, she still stood up attentively, as if the glory she desired was over there.

After Shalltear climbed up the stairs, she immediately got down on one knee at a short distance from the throne.

“Shalltear, I wish to talk about the matter which has been disturbing you.”

Just by hearing these words, Shalltear immediately understood what the master was referring to, and her face turned into a look of shame.

“Ah! Ainz-sama! About that matter, please give me my punishment! Even if I was clearly a Guardian, I still carried out such a grave sin so stupidly, please give me the most severe punishment!”

Shalltear's pained voice echoed around the Throne Room, and Cocytus was exceptionally able to relate to her feelings. No, any Guardian and all fellow creations of the Supreme Rulers were able to.

Even if they came under the effect of mind control, they would be unable to forgive themselves, who had turned their Supreme Ruler into an enemy.

"Is that so...then, Shalltear, come over here."

Seeing the master's hand beckoning towards her, Shalltear slowly crawled toward the throne.

To Shalltear who had hung her head upon arriving before the

throne, Ainz reached out with his bony hand and warmly stroked her head.

“Ai-Ainz-sama....”

Almost frightened to pieces, Shalltear cautiously raised her head and let out a small voice.

“...The failure that time was my miscalculation, even more so because the opposition possessed a World-class item, therefore things were looking south from the very outset. Shalltear... I love all of you who are loyal to Nazarick, all of you who were created from scratch. Of course, this also includes you. You who wishes for me to impose a severe punishment for something you are not guilty of, how could I do

such a thing?”

It was as if the master shifted his eyesight out of sadness. Cocytus had no means of knowing which direction the master had shifted his gaze, but it did seem like the master had slightly opened his mouth. The master’s face was completely skeletal and lacked lips, therefore it was impossible to determine this from the shape of his mouth, but the master should have spoken a name.

“Oh, Ainz-sama! You actually said that you love me!”

Shalltear’s emotion-filled voice resounded across the entire room.

Because he was behind Shalltear,

Cocytus could not see her face. However, everything was evident from her reaction. Her voice was choked with tears and her shoulders were shaking.

It was possible to see the master's other hand warmly caressing Shalltear's face, and his hand even held a white handkerchief.

"All right, all right, Shalltear, stop crying. This would ruin your pretty face."

Shalltear stayed silent, merely placing her face...probably her lips...upon the back of the hand that was just now stroking her hair.

Both Mare and Aura were already in tears.

Demiurge also slightly rubbed the corner of his eyes. Cocytus was a bit envious of those who were able to shed tears, and once again turned to look at the back of his companion who had pledged loyalty for life.

The thing that Shalltear was the most terrified about was probably the case where the last remaining and kind Supreme Ruler had given up on the useless, troublesome and disloyal her.

However, the master had shattered this source of concern.

Shattering it by using the word ‘Love’.

How much joy did Shalltear feel inside? He, Cocytus, who stood on a

similar platform as her...no... he who stood on a platform that was slightly worse off than hers, could only carry unparalleled envy in his gaze as he silently looked at her figure from behind.

“Then, Shalltear, you can step...”

“—Ainz-sama.”

A cold voice interrupted the master’s speech. This disrespectful act caused Cocytus to angrily stare daggers at Albedo. Following this, he felt his feelings jump into turmoil, and an unsettling feeling arose inside of him.

“Reward and punishment are a natural part of common sense. I still feel that it is necessary to hand

out some form of punishment."

"...Albedo, about my decision, are you not..."

The master's words stopped halfway. Cocytus had no idea what kind of reason would cause the master to halt his response. The last words should have settled the issue with Shalltear.

"Ainz-sama, I also support Albedo's opinion. Please hand down punishment upon me. This will also allow me to achieve joy out of loyalty."

"...I understand. Let us leave the determination of your punishment for a later time. Step down."

"Yes, Ainz-sama."

Shalltear's originally red eyes had turned even redder as she walked down the stairs and returned to her place and reassumed a respectful posture.

Afterward—

"Cocytus, Ainz-sama has a few words for you. Listen carefully."

A cold chill crawled down his spine.

It was finally his turn.

Cocytus hung his head incredibly low. When attending to the master, this kind of posture which only allowed him to gaze at the floor did indeed demonstrate an attitude of ultimate respect. However, Cocytus was like this because he lacked the courage to look straight at the

master's eyes.

"I have already seen your battle with the Lizardmen, Cocytus."

"Yes!"

"It resulted in a defeat."

"Yes! This instance was my failure, for which I offer my extreme apologies. Please also punish me—"

Cocytus's admission and apology was stopped by the sound of a staff striking the floor. Afterward, Albedo's cold voice immediately stimulated the hearing sensory organs.

"...Your attitude towards Ainz-sama is too disrespectful, Cocytus. If you wish to apologize, then do so with

your head raised."

"Disrespectful!"

He raised his head and looked up at his master who was seated on the throne.

"...Cocytus, as a defeated general, do you have any words you wish to say? This time you did not personally enter the front lines and only commanded from the back lines. What are your thoughts?"

"Yes, I was in charge of the military power. Since despite that I was unable to obtain victory, and furthermore even lost Ainz-sama's personally created Lich Commander, I am truly, extremely sorry!"

“Eh? Ah, there is no pity in losing that kind of disposable undead, don’t let this bother you. Cocytus, what I meant to ask about was your thoughts about warring with an army. Do treat this as the main purpose in your reply; I do not intend to blame you for this defeat.”

All of the Guardians and all of the servants standing behind them awaiting orders were thoroughly confused. All except for Demiurge and Albedo.

‘Oh! As it turns out, Demiurge was correct!’

Cocytus felt that the master was about to continue speaking, and frantically pieced together his thoughts.

“Because it was destined to be a defeat no matter who was in charge. Even if it were me.”

A brief wry laughter resounded throughout the Throne Room. For the Supreme Ruler, Ainz Ooal Gown, how was defeat possible? In fact, up until this point he had never experienced failure. With that in mind, what was said was nothing more than comforting words for Cocytus.

“However, the question is whether or not we have obtained anything from that battle. Cocytus, I now rephrase my question. What do you think needs to be done to obtain victory this time in battle?”

Cocytus began his thought analysis

silently. The present him knew what was needed for a victory, therefore he blurted out what he was missing.

“I underestimated the Lizardmen too much. It is only prudent to be more cautious with my actions.”

“Yes, that is precisely it! No matter how weak the opponent is, they cannot be underestimated...and Narberal should also be allowed to observe this battle. What else?”

“Yes, there was also insufficient information. From this battle I now understand that in a situation where I am unfamiliar with the extent of opponent’s strength and the terrain, the chances of victory would certainly be diminished.”

“Very good, what else?”

“Having an incompetent commander was also one of the problems. Because the ones battling were lower class undead, a commander should have been sent out who was flexible according to the circumstances and able to give out correct commands at the right times. Also, when taking into account the weapons used by the Lizardmen, the zombies should have been used as the main force in carrying out the attack, exhausting the opponent, or alternatively have all of the forces attack together and not act separately.”

“What else in addition?”

“...I am extremely sorry, at the

moment I can only come up with this much…"

"No need to apologize, what you say has been correct so far with quite remarkable perception. Of course, there are still other areas which need improvement, but you've already completely understood some things. To be honest, I would prefer that you did not have to ask others and discover these flaws by yourself…but it still counts as within the permissible spectrum. Well then, why did you not do those from the start?"

"…I did not consider them. I thought that merely using overwhelming military strength was enough to defeat the enemy."

“If it’s that... However, after sacrificing those undead, you now think differently right? Very good! So long as you are able to consistently improve yourself, and avoid another similar failure, then there is meaning to this defeat.”

Cocytus thought he saw the master break out a small smile.

“There are many different kinds of defeat, but your defeat was not of the fatal kind. Apart from that Lich, the rest were all automatically generated soldiers. Even if those undead were to perish, Nazarick would not be affected in any way. On the contrary, if a Guardian were able to learn a lesson, and no longer be defeated, then this defeat has been rather rewarding.”

“My extreme gratitude, Ainz-sama!”

“However, defeat in battle still remains a fact, therefore I will have you punished alongside Shalltear...”

At this moment, the master stopped speaking. After a short moment of silence waiting for the master to issue a punishment, Cocytus felt uneasy, but knowing that he had not disappointed the master, the axe of anxiety hanging over his head had already dissipated. However, the following words still made Cocytus shudder.

“Originally I planned to have you retreat to the back lines, however, perhaps this way is for the better. Cocytus, you shall personally wash away the shame of your defeat...go

exterminate those Lizardmen. This time you are not permitted to seek assistance from anyone else."

If the Lizardmen were wiped out, without letting word of this defeat spread, then Nazarick would still remain undefeated.

If one were to treat all living beings outside of Nazarick as inferior, then one would definitely relish the opportunity to slaughter them mercilessly for the sole purpose of washing away Nazarick's and one's own defeat. If it were the Cocytus of the past, he would also accept this order without hesitation, but then ——

Cocytus shivered all over.

Because he knew what the forthcoming action would represent.

Inhaling deep breaths several times, then exhaling.

Cocytus did not respond to the master's request, causing all of the others at the scene to feel puzzled before Cocytus eventually replied.

"There is a matter I wish to request of Ainz-sama!"

It was as if the whole world had stopped, with all of the spectators focusing their attention towards him.

Cocytus was a Guardian. Even in Nazarick, he had the highest level of authority and skill, with only a

handful of others being able to be compared to him. Despite this, he felt a wave of cold chill that made his entire body shiver.

Although regret gushed out like a torrent from inside of him, it was all already too late to take back his words.

Although Cocytus possessed compound eyes which enabled him to have a quite broad field of vision, his head was completely lowered and thus had no means of seeing the master's expression. This became his salvation, because if the master expressed anger or displeasure, Cocytus would be frightened to the point of petrification.

“I implore of you, Ainz-sama!”

Before the master made any response, another interrupted Cocytus’s speech.

“You dare!”

The one who made the denouncement was Albedo, with a deafening scream, as expectedly formidable as one would expect from the Overseer of the Guardians. Cocytus, who was powerless to move, felt as if he was a young child scolded harshly by his mother, and could not stop trembling.

“You who allowed the glory of Nazarick to suffer a defeat, what standing do you have to make a

request from Ainz-sama?! Simply outrageous!"

Cocytus did not utter a single word and resolved to not raise his head without obtaining the master's approval first. Even if Albedo's anger intensified, he would not waver.

"If you don't—"

However Albedo's anger was interrupted by a man's calm voice, and dissipated like smoke.

"—Don't be like this, Albedo."

The master repeated his words to pacify Albedo who had burst forth.

"Raise your head, Cocytus. What request do you have, and can you

share it with us?”

That calm voice was devoid of any anger, but this just made it even more terrifying. That fear was very similar to peering and feeling imminently sucked into a bottomless lake.

Wearing equipment, Cocytus could resist fear-inducing mental attacks from external forces. That was why the fear attacking his being originated from within himself.

After swallowing a mouthful of his own saliva—more accurately described as a mouthful of poison—Cocytus slowly raised his head, and looked at the Supreme Ruler who was his master.

The light shining in the master's empty eye sockets seemed to slightly turn into a shade of bright red.

"I repeat myself again, what request do you have, and can you share it with us?"

He could not utter a single word. Although he tried to speak out many times, it was stuck in his throat, and no words could come out.

"What is it, Cocytus?"

Heavy silence filled the air.

"...I am not angry, I merely wish to know what you are thinking, and what you request."

As if comforting a child that remained silent, the tone was quite gentle. Under this gentle encouragement, Cocytus eventually said:

“I oppose exterminating all of the Lizardmen, and I request for your mercy.”

After giving his decisive speech, Cocytus felt as if the atmosphere was shaking. No, the atmosphere was actually convulsing.

The main source came from the front—from Albedo’s killing intent. The secondary source was from the wavering confidence of the other Guardians. Only Demiurge and the master were as calm as a still lake and were unaffected by any ripples.

“...Cocytus, do you know what you are asking of?”

Albedo’s cold voice was filled with murderous intent, even causing Cocytus, whose entire body was of a frozen attribute, to feel a chill.

“Ainz-sama commanded you to exterminate the Lizardmen, as penance for your crime, yet you as the defendant dare to sing a different tune... Guardian of the 5th Floor Cocytus, have you become afraid of the Lizardmen?”

That tone was mocking, but Cocytus could not refute what was asserted.

It was natural for Albedo to have that attitude. If their positions were

reversed, Cocytus would probably also be aggravated.

“You remain sil—”

What made Albedo shut her mouth was not a voice, but the sound of a striking sound. That was the resonating sound made by the staff coming into contact with the floor.

“Albedo, quiet. It is I who am asking Cocytus, don’t be presumptuous.”

“My extreme apologies! Please, please forgive me!”

Albedo lowered her head in apology and returned to her original position.

The master turned his gaze around, and stared at Cocytus with sharp

eyes. It was still impossible to determine the master's emotions. It looked as if it was at the bursting point of rage, yet it could also be an amused look.

"Cocytus, seeing as you make such a request, the reason must be due to some benefit towards the Great Tomb of Nazarick right? Do explain."

"Yes! In the future, tenacious warriors may appear amongst them. As such, exterminating them completely at this stage would be too much of a waste. This subordinate reckons that it is in our interests that we should wait for more tenacious Lizardmen to appear in the future, and for now have them pledge their deep loyalty

to Nazarick and accept them to serve us."

"...This suggestion is indeed not a bad one. Lizardmen corpses are of high quality when used to serve as undead in comparison to using human corpses. If only it was possible to have a perfect method of collecting the corpses buried in E-Rantel, then there would be no purpose in using the Lizardmen corpses."

Just as Cocytus was about to say 'So then...', he realized that the master had not finished with his speech. He felt an uneasy premonition which unfortunately became a reality.

"However, compared to using

Lizardmen, if I were to use corpses to create undead, the efficiency in terms of consumption cost should be higher. Not only is it possible to guarantee loyalty, but it is also not necessary to waste consumables. The Lizardmen's advantage is that eventually they can increase their population, and this advantage would require a lengthy period of time to realize... If I have missed out anything, speak up for us to hear. Is there any other benefit which can convince me?"

If it were possible to obtain the master's mercy, his own desire would be realized. However, Cocytus could not think of any other benefit.

This was because all along he had

considered himself as a weapon, and would only rely on the master to command the troops, and also because he himself had never considered this before, which was why he had no further means to convince the master. He had not considered what should be done to allow for the group as a whole to reap the most benefits beforehand.

Furthermore, what the master requested was a benefit in relation to the Great Tomb of Nazarick. Cocytus did not wish to exterminate the Lizardmen because they had dazzling and outstanding individuals; he was attracted to those who protected a group because he was a warrior himself. However, these thoughts were his personal feelings, and not a

decision based to serve the wider group.

Cocytus was frantic.

If he allowed his silently watching master to become agitated or displeased, then this miraculous suggestion would become meaningless, and all that would result would be the command to exterminate all of the Lizardmen from before.

He desperately racked his brain, but still could not come up with an answer.

“What is it, Cocytus, can you not come up with one? Then shall the final decision be extermination?”

The question had been repeated.

Cocytus's mind was completely blank, his teeth felt heavy, and only his thoughts were ceaselessly darting around and coming up with nothing.

A deep voice resounded throughout the gravely silent Throne Room.

"...Is that so...what a shame."

Just as these 'what a shame' words were about to suffocate Cocytus into silence, a calm voice lent out a helping hand.

"Ainz-sama, please allow me to insert a few words from the sidelines."

"...What is it, Demiurge? Do you have something to add?"

“Yes. About Ainz-sama’s earlier decision, if it is convenient, would you be willing to listen to my humble opinion?”

“...Then speak it out for us to hear.”

“Yes! Ainz-sama, you fully understand the importance of experimentation, therefore, would you consider having a few Lizardmen to be taken here for experimentation?”

“Oh, this is an excellent suggestion.”

Cocytus felt that as the master leaned forward from the throne, those two red eyes almost seemed to rest on himself for a brief second.

“Yes. First, no matter how Nazarick

turns out to be in the future, we will eventually come across a day where we require a completely different composition of strength, or will require control over different species. This subordinate believes that at that moment, having done a competent amount of controlled experimentation and not having done a sufficient amount of control experimentation will be the determining factor."

Demiurge stood even more rigidly upright and looked directly at the master seated upon the throne before giving his conclusion.

"I believe that we should control the Lizardmen tribe, and commence a controlled experiment that doesn't base on fear."

The sound of a staff striking the floor resounded throughout the surroundings.

“...An excellent suggestion, Demiurge.”

“A thousand thanks.”

“Then, about the Lizardmen group, I shall go with Demiurge’s suggestion and change the extermination order into that of leadership. Does anyone have any objections to the decision? If there are any, raise your hand.”

Those glimmering deep red eyes gazed over each of the Guardians.

“...Looks like there are no objections. Then it shall be decided.”

All of the persons lowered their heads, demonstrating that they understood.

“However, Demiurge, your suggestion is remarkable, impressive even.”

Demiurge lightly smiled.

“I do not dare to assume so, Ainz-sama. You should have already been aware of this long ago, and merely waited for Cocytus to suggest it, right?”

The master did not reply, and only revealed a wry smile. However, the master’s attitude already exposed everything.

Cocytus felt his whole body immediately relax.

He was clearly in charge of commanding the glorious Nazarick army, yet he had produced a defeat. When he voiced a different opinion to the master's decision, he had not prepared an alternative solution. How should this be described? It would probably be—

'Incompetent. I am so incompetent.'

"...No, that was not the case, Demiurge. You place me in too high a regard. I merely wished that you are able to express your own thoughts, regardless of what kind of thoughts they are."

The master's gaze once again shifted and paused on Cocytus for the longest time. Understanding the

meaning behind his master's words, although Cocytus felt shame, he also felt powerless to lower his head.

"The first task is to understand the real meaning behind orders. After paying close attention to understanding the orders, you then carry out the most appropriate course of action. Guardians, after listening carefully, you must not blindly follow orders and take action. Before action, you must give some thought to what should be done for the best interests of Nazarick. If you think that there is a mistake in the contents of your orders, or if you can come up with an even better method, your duty is to come before me, or the one who made the suggestion, to report—So

then, Cocytus, going back to the earlier topic, I mentioned that you will be punished, right?"

"Yes. You wanted me to exterminate the Lizardmen as a group."

"Indeed. However, right now you are not to exterminate them, but to control. As such, I have to alter your punishment. The Lizardmen group shall be your responsibility to control, and they are to develop a deep loyalty within their hearts towards Nazarick. You are forbidden from using fear to induce control, and the Lizardmen are to become a controlled unit not created out of fear."

Cocytus had never shouldered such

a heavy responsibility before—No, amongst all of the Guardians, perhaps only Demiurge had had such a kind of experience.

'This difficult mission is self-imposed.' This thought briefly flashed across Cocytus's mind, but how could he voice out such cowardly words. These words could not be said regardless if it was to the tolerant Supreme Ruler to whom he had pledged his undying loyalty, or to his comrade who lent a helping hand.

"I hear and obey. Because there are many concerns, I would be grateful for any assistance and advice from others."

"Of course, this matter will

necessarily require various pieces of information, rations and manpower. Regarding these aspects, the responsibility will be left with Nazarick."

"I am extremely grateful. I, Cocytus, swear that I shall deliver good results and will not squander Ainz-sama's benevolence."

Cocytus shouted out these words from his heart.

"Good. Then all of the Guardians are henceforth ordered to head out to attack. One side shall act as bait, and the other side shall be responsible for demonstrating our true strength, to show these Lizardmen that our true strength is not merely that small amount. Of

course, if, Cocytus, you think this will detrimentally affect their control in the aftermath, I can rescind my order."

Cocytus thought carefully then replied:

"There should be no problems."

"Is that so. Then, all of the Guardians, immediately prepare to depart."

All of the Guardians at the scene voiced out their affirmation and understanding in unison.

"Albedo, I also wish to head out. Help with preparing the soldiers."

"As you command. After giving it some thought, there are also some

enemies who have a preference for spying. Is it that we can conveniently allow them to miscalculate our true objective?"

"That is precisely it. However, do not forget that we also have an objective of making a demonstration."

"Then, we can send out Nazarick's Veteran Guards to act as the main force, so that the composition of the army appears even more powerful."

Cocytus internally agreed with Albedo's response.

There was a kind of undead guard known as the Veteran Guard.

Nazarick Veteran Guards only

existed amongst the guards of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. It could be said that Veteran Guards were high-class undead. They possessed items with various magic effects, and were equipped with magic armor and shields, and furthermore were skilled in fighting special abilities. They were quite excellent undead guards.

“There are no problems with that. How many do you require?”

“Three thousand.”

“That’s a little on the smaller side. With those kind of numbers, it will be difficult to reach an earth-shattering effect. ...We want to obtain an overwhelming victory this time, causing those who look down

on Nazarick to feel true terror. If the number is less than the previous instance, then there is no meaning in it. I hope that I can double the numbers. What other units can we use?"

"Then, we can also mobilize Nazarick's Elder Guard and Nazarick's Master Guards, what do you think? With this, the number will reach 6,000."

No wonder she was the Overseer of the Guardians. Albedo's response was as fluid as water. To this, Ainz gave a concise answer.

"Very well! Then, have there been any problems in activating Gargantua?"

“None, Ainz-sama. We have already gotten Gargantua operational.”

“Then, Shalltear, you shall use 「Transfer」 to send all of the forces over.”

“But if it is only myself, then my magic power is insufficient.”

“Allow Pestunia to assist. Have her transfer magic power to you. If it is still not enough, find Lupusregina to assist.”

“Understood.”

“Following that, have Nigredo and Pandora’s Actor’s alarm network transferred to our side here. Although this will allow Sebas’s alarm network to slightly weaken...we are only able to

physically strengthen our monitoring. Very well! Then, everyone move out! Tomorrow we will give the Lizardmen a taste of the Great Tomb of Nazarick's true strength."

Part 2

"Thank you, Demiurge."

After the master had left the Throne Room, the first thing that Cocytus did was to give his thanks to Demiurge. To Cocytus who was bowing deeply, Demiurge gave one of his regular slight smiles.

"No, it was nothing."

"That won't do. If it were not for you, the Lizardmen would definitely

have been exterminated."

"...Cocytus, I would say that you should not take Ainz-sama's words at face level. I believe that Ainz-sama originally expected things to turn out this way."

Demiurge raised a finger during this explanation, after which there was a surprised voice. The one who gave out that voice sounded like himself, yet also sounded like it came from all of the surrounding Guardians.

"That also means to say that I reckon that Ainz-sama predicted that you would say those words earlier, thus he sent you to be the commander for the invasion of the Lizardmen settlement. I also believe

this because when you opposed the extermination of the Lizardmen settlement, Ainz-sama appeared to be extremely delighted, and when you were unable to suggest an alternative, he looked quite disappointed in comparison."

"Then what you mean to say is that Ainz-sama felt disappointment because things did not go according to his plan?"

"That is precisely it. It also means that all of the dialogue that happened in this place was quite possibly within Ainz-sama's predictions."

"No wonder he is Ainz-sama! Apparently he has perfectly calculated this far ahead!"

“B-But then....a-about tha-that...”

“...If you have something to say then be quick about it.”

The elder sister Aura severely directed her stuttering younger brother Mare to speak quickly.

“Y-Yes, about that, I always felt that something was off. At the start, why were those weak undead assigned. Th-That...c-can’t say for certain, maybe Ainz-sama set this expedition up to fail from the very beginning...”

“Instead of thinking of defeat as a given, maybe our master took into account that Cocytus would scout the Lizardmen out and report back the viability of the task?”

Cocytus thought back to that conversation he had with Demiurge and felt ashamed, because he had screwed everything up.

“If he was not familiar with Cocytus’s personality, it would not have been possible to carry out this plan. As expected of Ainz-sama...”

“In the battle with Shalltear it was already possible to figure out Ainz-sama’s fighting ability, but it was not expected that he was also a strategist of the highest class. It truly is remarkable to the highest degree. Although Ainz-sama said what he said, I still feel that it is sufficient to act accordingly to Ainz-sama’s orders...”

“It really is incredible. Being able to

bring together all of the Supreme Rulers, goes to show that his name is not just for show."

After Demiurge whose brain was top-class finished, Shalltear approved what was said with delight, and all of the other Guardians nodded their heads in agreement.

♦ ♦ ♦

Ainz returned to his room and leaped onto his bed. After a lengthy

hang time, Ainz's body fell into the bed, then—he began to roll around.

Rolled right, then rolled left.

He was only able to roll as such because the bed was large enough.

Although his exquisite chang pao[10] was already greatly wrinkled, Ainz, who was completely fine with this happening, continued to laugh softly as he rolled around. Of course, he acted so childishly because nobody else apart from himself was allowed to enter.

Not long afterward, Ainz who was fully satisfied in his indulgence in the mattress, laid there facing the ceiling.

"Haaa, so tired... Ah~ I really wish

to indulge myself in alcohol to my heart's content, and drink myself into a stupor...although that's no longer possible."

Ainz finished complaining then gave a big sigh—However Ainz did not breathe, that was why it was merely the appearance of a false sigh.

It was because he was an undead, that was why he was indifferent to physical and mental fatigue. However, to describe it in human terms, for the past month he had been worn out every day. If he still had a stomach, it would have been long ruined by now.

Because Ainz had been enduring pressure.

Momon the warrior had vanquished the silver-haired vampire—Shalltear. For those who didn't know, perhaps they would only consider this feat as incredible, but to the mysterious person who used a World-class item on Shalltear, it would give another impression. The opponent would probably keep a close eye on Momon, or even establish contact.

That was why Ainz had remained on alert for the entire day, and had also prepared several cash items to enable him to escape at any moment. During his free time, apart from maintaining alertness, he had also done some imaginary role-playing—or perhaps better called paranoia training—visualizing if the opponent had shown up, would he be able to escape while at the same

time devoting energy to collecting information.

Although being stressed out like this every day had no real impact on Ainz Ooal Gown, it was still mentally taxing on the remnants of humanity he still possessed, as the human Satoru Suzuki. During his free time where he was able to relax and be by himself, he would push aside his attitude as Nazarick's Supreme Ruler, and revert to his childish behavior. This was probably because deep within Ainz, that stressed out and tired Satoru Suzuki desired to act like that.

"I have no memories of ever having such restless and sleepless work before...makes me wonder how much overtime I will be getting this

month.”

This outburst of complaint was perhaps due to the Satoru Suzuki’s personality taking over Ainz.

“The Great Tomb of Nazarick...no, I mean Ainz Ooal Gown...is not a corporation. Joint venture companies are compassionate enterprises, and should fully guarantee compensation for employees’ overtime.”

Rambling as such, Ainz pursed his nonexistent eyebrows.

“Eh? ...It can’t be because of duty allowance that I am not entitled to overtime compensation? Wow...”

Ainz once again rolled left and right. After rolling over about five

or six times, he suddenly stopped moving.

“Enough...meaningless babble needs to stop here... Come to think of it, Cocytus was quite incredible too, being able to speak out as he did.”

It was surprising. Apparently Cocytus would empathize with the Lizardmen.

That action of Cocytus had made Ainz feel greatly troubled.

Satoru Suzuki was the kind of person whom, when preparing a briefing, would first fully assemble all of the data, then proceed by following standard practice to the letter. As such, he was not

accustomed to dealing with unexpected problems. However, if only it were mentioned in writing as part of the information, then he would be able to handle it according to the data. In other words, for Satoru Suzuki, the key to the success of his briefings were that any problems were already dealt with at the investigation stage. Such a person was extremely unsuited for situations where it was necessary to adapt to the situation, to the point that he detested such scenarios.

As it was, it was neither possible to bring data into the Throne Room, nor have the comfort of being able to say ‘then, please turn to the next page’. Therefore Ainz had prepared for the flow of events in the Throne

Room long before, by rehearsing the entire sequence in his mind for more than ten times. In his heart, he had even prayed that nobody would act unexpectedly.

And this small wish of his had been shattered by Cocytus.

He was extremely worried about what Cocytus wanted to say, but had also felt delighted.

It was because at the same time he also had the pleasure similar to that of a parent—it was as if there was a docile child in the household who had, for the first time, expressed his own opinion. The most important thing was that the person's development had exceeded Ainz's sexpectations by far.

When he returned to Nazarick previously, he asked a maid to cook a dish. What he asked for was steak. With elements such as proficiency level, she might require more practice, but the steak didn't require high levels to be made. He was not expecting the meal to provide buffs upon consumption, just something that could be eaten.

However the result could only be described as a blackened piece of charcoal.

Even if that maid repeated the exercise nonstop, the end product was always charred meat.

While he was accepting that maid's sincere apologies, Ainz was also able to fully accept these results

which were within expectations. It was exactly the same as when Ainz was trying to equip a large sword in the dressing room.

In YGGDRASIL, only those who possessed the job-specific special ability were able to cook. This was because food could temporarily raise battle capability through buffs, which was why requiring a job specific special ability was natural. However, that maid did not have the cooking special ability.

That also meant that if he wanted to do something which required a special ability yet lacked the skill himself, he would be bound to fail.

This matter regarding Cocytus was Ainz's objective all along, which

could also be described as an experiment. Ainz wanted to test if his servants, who already had their settings fixed, were able to learn new things. This experiment concerned proving whether they could continue to develop after learning tactics or strategy. Allowing Cocytus to command weak undead was because he simply thought that through defeat he could probably obtain much more.

Ainz was extremely pleased with the end result. Cocytus had shown Ainz that there was the possibility of such growth.

Of course, there was a large difference between learning through actual actions, and merely

learning through memorization.

Ainz's eventual objective was to acquire and perfect all of the magic particular to this world—if such did exist. Right now, Ainz was still uncertain of whether the currently existing magic was either technique or knowledge. In any case, this experiment proved that the knowledge aspect could indeed be developed.

Cocytus proved that growth was possible. He demonstrated this exceedingly well.

Ainz thought to himself.

Without growth, one could only wait until eventually one stopped. Even if they were powerful now,

there would eventually be a day where they would certainly be surpassed.

Even if he had a 100-year lead in military technology, if he no longer made any progress, then eventually there would be one day where he would lose the position of being the most powerful. Right now, the neighboring country could probably count as a powerful nation, but if it believed that it would forever preserve its status as the most powerful nation, without any need for further improvement, that would be incredibly foolish to a fault.

“Even if those are my thoughts...but while I am overjoyed that the child has grown up, at the same time I

worry whether I am a person worthy of their loyalty as the Supreme Ruler."

As he rambled on, Ainz gazed at the ceiling above the bed.

"Ah, ah, so scary, so terrifying..."

The remnants of the human personality, Satoru Suzuki, once again lamented because of this new source of unease.

'Since growth represents change, then who can guarantee that their current loyalty will not waver either? Even if it does not change, there is still the possibility that one day I will be considered ill-suited to be the glorious Supreme Ruler of Nazarick. A worry that I, who was

nominated to be the Guild Master, will lose the right to be branded as such.'

"...I have to become a Supreme Ruler worthy of the Guardians' loyalty...is there anyone who can teach me in the ways of being an emperor...?"

There shouldn't be anyone who was so conveniently programmed that way in Nazarick.

Trapped in his own thoughts, the images of two people came to Ainz's smind. Those two were part of the dreadful five-person team, respectively the one who held the title of Duke, Lord of Terror, and the one who had 'King' in his name, Gashokukochuuou. Carefully

considering whether or not he should approach those two individuals to be educated, Ainz gave a short response to himself.

“...Pass.”

Unless he ran into a dead end, he did not wish to be taught by those two.

“Let it be...so long as no major mistakes are made during actions, I should be fine for the moment. Anyways...about those bipedal sheep...”

Ainz was already aware of the identity of the bipedal sheep long before, which was why he did not pursue specific details of the bipedal sheep’s appearance. That

was a type of monster which he had encountered before in YGGDRASIL.

“Having the heads of both a lion and a mountain goat, as well as the tail of a snake, paws of a lion, and legs of a mountain sheep. That should be right...it is a chimera...”

In YGGDRASIL, chimeras walked around on two sheep legs and used their lion legs as arms to initiate attacks; a monster which was born with a lion’s head and a mountain goat’s head. This monster’s appearance was based off the deity called Baphomet.

Then why did Demiurge not directly say it was a chimera? Although he pondered this question, Ainz already had his answer.

“That is, it could possibly be a chimera subspecies. Is that how it is, Demiurge?”

Ainz laughed heartily, then added a note to his evaluation of Demiurge: ‘Unexpectedly poor name-picking taste’.

“In YGGDRASIL there is also a species like the Chimera Lord whose appearance was a bit... No, I should say the appearance of fish-type chimera is strange to the point of being disgusting. Bipedal sheep is a new species of chimera... Theocracy chimera...having someone bring one to Nazarick isn’t a bad idea either. Then there’s also Victim...”

His appearance was exactly the

same as in Ainz's smemories, except there was one feature which caught his attention.

"The language he used...it really is the Enoch language used by angels, right? It feels like conversing with someone who speaks another language..."

Because it was already automatically translated, Ainz had no idea which language was spoken, but he felt that it was a bit strange. Of course, it could very possibly be because Ainz himself didn't understand the Enoch language.

"Let it be, no need to debate it. Good, it's about time to set out for battle..."

Ainz once again rolled left and right to get enough of it. After he stopped and laid there, he returned to pondering over the points he was concerned about earlier.

He buried his head inside the bed and took a deep breath.

Of course, Ainz did not have lungs, therefore this was just a feigned action. However, inconceivably, he could smell a fragrance.

“This is a floral smell...is there perfume on the bed? Could it be that wealthy people’s beds are all like this? If that is so, that really is surprising...perhaps those pretending to be wealthy can also notice this aspect? Mmmm...”

Part 3

There was a type of ability called 「Danger Perception」.

Amongst adventurers, bandits and others that possessed discovery-based skills, this was considered the most important ability. Just as the name stipulated, it was an ability which enabled the detection of danger.

This ability was split into two types. One type was not reliant on reasoning or observation, merely reliant on sense to trigger awareness. The other type was awareness which was reliant on reasoning and observation accumulated from experience. The former could be described as a sixth

sense internal feeling, and the latter could be described as one which was derived from the small changes in the surroundings—one derived from minute changes in sound and smell.

The latter would be naturally improved on the battlefield and during solo adventures, even if it were not intentionally trained. It was obtained through experience by placing oneself in dangerous situations.

And ability-wise, this aspect of Lizardmen was many times greater than that of humans. Biologically, their sensory organs were more sensitive, because they lived in harsher environments. Humans tended to live in safe places far

from monsters, whereas Lizardmen lived as neighbors to such monsters.

Zaryusu, who was a traveler and often traveled alone, was even more sensitive to slight changes in the environment.

Feeling tension filling the air, he opened his eyes.

Before him was a familiar room—although he had only stayed here for several days. Humans, even if they tried to, would not be able to make out details in this room which had no light source, but it was not that difficult for Lizardmen.

There was nothing out of the ordinary in the room.

Zaryusu looked around, and after confirming that there were no strange objects, he gave a sigh of relief as he moved to sit upright.

He was an outstanding warrior, which was why even if he was sleeping moments ago, he was as awake as normal. There wasn't an issue of drowsiness, as he was even energetic enough to immediately enter battle.

This was also related to the fact that Lizardmen were habitually light sleepers.

However, Crusch who was sleeping beside Zaryusu showed no signs of waking up.

Having lost the body warmth of

Zaryusu, Crush merely sleepily let out a dissatisfied soft murmur.

If it were under normal circumstances, Crusch would also sense the change in the air and wake up, however, this time it seemed as if she had not noticed at all.

Zaryusu felt some regret, whether or not he had allowed Crusch to shoulder too many burdens.

He recalled last night, and came to the opinion that the burden on Crusch was perhaps greater than his. During the operation of defeating the powerful opponent, the Lich, the female Crusch seemed to have suffered a greater burden than the male Zaryusu.

He himself wished that he could allow her to continue sleeping, but after listening carefully, he could hear the frantic movements of many Lizardmen beyond the house doors. At these times when various emergencies had already occurred, not waking her up would might be more dangerous.

“Crusch, Crusch.”

Zaryusu used a bit of force to shake Crusch several times.

“Mmm... Mmmm...”

Crusch curled her tail, then immediately revealed her red eyes.

“Mmm...?”

“It looks like something has

happened."

This phrase caused the drowsy Crusch to instantly widen her eyes. Zaryusu grabbed Frost Pain which was by his side and immediately stood up, and not long afterward, Crusch was also out of bed.

The two of them walked outside and immediately understood the reason for the commotion.

They saw a large, thick dark cloud covering the air above the village.

Looking to the distance, they could tell within a moment that the dark cloud was completely different to ordinary dark clouds. This was because it was a clear cloudless sky for miles around.

That also meant that this was—

“It’s...back?”

It was the enemy’s signal for another attack—

“Looks like it.”

Crusch agreed with this view. All of the Lizardmen of the five tribes that had grouped together to fight could see the dark cloud in the middle of the sky, and were talking about it. However nobody had a look of fear on their faces.

That was because they were victorious under unfavorable circumstances in the previous battle, causing everyone to become more spirited.

The two of them ran toward the village, giving off splashes of water as they sprinted. They passed by several Lizardmen who were commencing their battle preparations, and wasted no time in arriving at the main entrance.

There were many warrior-class Lizardmen already gathered at the main entrance, all of them cautiously prying outwards. Included amongst them was their familiar companion, one who had gone through hell and back with them, Zenberu, and beside him was the tribal chief of the Small Fang Tribe.

After Zenberu waved toward the two individuals who were generating large splashing noises as

they came over, he immediately jutted his jaw toward the direction of outside the entrance.

Zaryusu and Crusch stood beside Zenberu and observed outward from the main entrance.

On the other side of the shore, at the boundary between the wetlands and the forest, was an army composed of skeletons.

“So they have come again.”

“Huh...”

Zaryusu responded to Zenberu, then clicked his tongue.

This was anticipated, except they had arrived too soon. At first he reckoned that since their losses

were so severe, they would require some time to replenish their troops, and had not considered having completely miscalculated. Apparently, the opponent was capable of once again marshaling units for a large army.

“...However, these skeletons should be weaker than those summoned by the Lich.”

These words had a hidden meaning. What Zenberu meant was that he believed that the current skeleton army was in fact stronger than the one which invaded before.

Zaryusu also intently observed the skeletons arranged on the shore of the other side. This was to size up the opponent’s strength, to then

carry out the appropriate defensive actions.

Indeed, they were all skeletons, but the ones this time were different from the previous ones.

For outward appearances, the biggest difference was their equipment. The skeletons from before were only equipped with rusty swords, but the skeletons this time were quite well equipped. Furthermore, their physique seemed better than the ones from last time. The skeletons seemed to have three different kinds of equipment.

The most numerous kind of skeleton wore elaborate breastplates. In one hand they held

triangular-shaped shields, kite shields, and in the other hand they held all sorts of weapons. They even carried quivers and compound bows on their backs. These were skeletons which were equipped to be both offensive and defensive, with capabilities to fight at both long and short distances.

Next were helmeted skeletons which wore identical breastplates, draped in tattered red cloaks, holding bucklers and bastard swords.

Finally, and the fewest in number, were the skeletons which were fully equipped. They wore beautiful shining gold full body armor, and held lustrous spears in their hands. Their dazzling fresh red cloaks had

not a speck of dirt on them.

Zaryusu observed this much, and discovered a particular fact. He couldn't help but doubt if he had seen incorrectly, and rubbed his eyes several times. However that remained a reality.

"Eh...that can't be..."

"H-How is that possible..."

At the same time as Crusch's exclamation, Zaryusu who had discovered the same fact involuntarily spoke out in a pained low voice. This time, Zenberu replied:

"...Oh, you realized it too."

Zenberu's voice was also extremely

pained.

“Mmm...”

Zaryusu was done with speaking, and remained silent. He did not wish to speak, because once words came out, he would be terrified. Yet it was impossible to remain silent:

“...Their weapons seem to be magic equipment.”

Crusch by his side nodded solemnly.

All of the various equipment on the skeleton army carried magic power. Some of the skeletons carried flaming swords, some held blue electric hammers, and some skeletons even held spears with tips coated in a green light, or had

sickles coated in a viscous purple liquid.

“Looks like that is not it. You two should also look closely at the armor and shields. Those...are also magic defensive equipment.”

Hearing Zenberu utter these words, Zaryusu immediately looked closely.

Following this he even more involuntarily let out a groan. This was because Zaryusu discovered that those shining armor and shields looked simply like they were naturally luminescent, and not at all like if the light given off was from the reflection of sunlight.

Just what kind of authority could

enable such numerous skeleton soldiers to all be equipped with magic items? If it were simply magic weapons which had heightened sharpness, Zaryusu had heard it was possible for large countries to achieve this amount over a long period of planning and accumulation. However, to enable each magic weapon to have an attribute—furthermore to have quite a large variety of effects—was a completely different matter altogether.

Zaryusu thought of the Dwarves which Zenberu had mentioned a few days ago.

Dwarves were a mountainous race which excelled in metalworking. During feasts, those Dwarves would

often talk about the legend of a particular hero—the King who established the great Kingdom of Dwarves, the hero who wore shining metal armor and defeated a dragon single-handedly, then becoming one of the Thirteen Heroes, the 'Magic Engineer'. Even within the legends told by the Dwarves, there were no stories which told of this kind of magnitude of magic equipment preparation—for a legion exceeding over five thousand units.

Then, what was the scene before Zaryusu?

"...Is that an army from myths?"

If this was not a story from mankind, then it must be a scenario

from a mythical story.

Zaryusu's entire body was trembling. Because he realized that this exceeded his predictions, and they were facing an enemy which absolutely should not be provoked.

However, from the very start, he himself had gathered everybody here while carrying on his conscience the fact that they could all be wiped out. How could he, who had started this outrageous battle, be afraid? He had already figured out that the opponent was a powerful enemy which exceeded their imagination. The importance was on what to do now.

"Impossible. That must be an illusion."

All of the people at the scene who heard these words shortly displayed an expression that spoke ‘what kind of nonsense are you spewing’. The opponent was indeed silent and immobile, but their existence was plainly clear. They even gave off an atmosphere which caused people to tremble, therefore they could not be a simple illusion.

However, these words would cause confusion, which was why the one who broke the silence was the tribal chief of the Small Fang Tribe. He absolutely could not have gone deranged, which was why he spoke these words.

“What basis do you have for such an assertion?”

Towards Zaryusu's question, the Small Fang Tribe chief confidently answered:

"We have taken turns in sending out scouts, yet nobody has seen that kind of undead before. With a number such as that, there is no way they could have remained undiscovered. Of course, all of the scouts who were sent out have returned safely."

"So that is why...however, I don't think that is an illusion."

"...But then...no, perhaps it is not an illusion. If it is not an illusion, we can imagine that an underground tunnel was used for their transport. If there is such an underground passage, it could explain why they

were not discovered before their arrival."

"...It does not matter whether they used a tunnel to get here, or whether they flew through the skies. What should we do now? Although they look as if they have no intention of starting the fight, it still feels like they are not here to negotiate."

"It does seem that way...however, think about the previous situation. I feel that the opponent will initiate some sort of action..."

Zaryusu stared at the skeleton army.

He was looking for the commander amongst the enemy—at this

moment, a chilly wind rose. It didn't stop and continued to blow.

Such a strange and sudden freezing wind could not be a natural phenomenon. It had to be created by magic.

"Wind? Eh...that can't be! This must be another kind of magic...how is this possible..."

Crusch held herself and trembled. The reason for that did not appear to be because she felt cold, therefore Zaryusu asked:

"Crusch, what is the matter with this cold wind..."

"...Perhaps you will have no way of believing this, but hear me out Zaryusu. I originally thought that

the climate change in the past was created through magic of the 4th tier, 「Cloud Control」, but I was wrong. Although 「Cloud Control」 is able to control clouds, it is unable to generate these kinds of cold wind. Which is why...this is not simply the control of clouds, but actually causing changes in the weather and meteorology. That means, I believe that the opponent has been activating 6th tier magic... 「Weather Control」."

However, that kind of magic belonged to a realm that was beyond her capabilities, which was why she lacked self-confidence— Crusch explained this to Zaryusu in a low voice, such that none else could listen in.

Zaryusu knew how shocking it was to have magic in the realm of the 6th tier. That kind of magic was in a realm which could not even be attained by his most powerful adversary to date, Iguvua. It was also believed to be the highest tier of magic in this world.

“Is this...the strength of the Supreme One? So that’s how it is...then it makes sense...”

If 6th tier magic could be used, then being hailed as the ‘Supreme One’ was no overstatement.

“Hey, hey, hey, it seems that everyone is anything at all but reassured.”

Zenberu’s complaint accurately

pointed out the atmosphere in the surroundings.

Cold wind which could not possibly appear at this moment—meant that this was an unnatural change in the environment. This caused the Lizardmen's morale to plummet to the lowest levels.

The degree of change only extended to clouds last time. If it were only that, even the druids could pull it off by putting together a large bonfire ceremony. However, once the Lizardmen felt this kind of autumn-like wind, they realized that the opponent possessed great power. Power to control the weather, which was supposedly an uncontrollable natural phenomenon.

Even if they had not heard Crusch's words, the ceaselessly blowing cold current was enough to depict just how powerful their impending battle adversary was.

"Cheh, the opponent has begun to move."

Zaryusu gritted his teeth, using willpower to suppress his tail from fiercely waving about. Just as he anticipated, sure enough the opponent had chosen this moment to move out.

After the organized skeleton army begun their advance, marching uniformly with precise equidistant footsteps, the nearby warrior-class Lizardmen immediately became frantic, and some even let out deep

warning growls. However, Zaryusu who observed the skeleton army moving silently, formed a different opinion. That was not the initiation of a battle.

Just as Zaryusu and Zenberu were about to request aloud for the panicking Lizardmen to calm down —

"—Calm down!"

A majestic shout which rippled the atmosphere sounded out.

Everybody looked toward the same direction, and found themselves looking at Shasuryu.

"I say again, calm down."

In this silent space, only this voice

filled with self-confidence and authority reverberated.

“Also, do not be afraid, warriors. Above all else, you must not allow your many ancestral spirits behind to you feel disappointment.”

Shasuryu passed through the group of Lizardmen which had retained their calm and were peacefully silent, and arrived by Zaryusu’s side.

“Younger Brother, what action has the opponent taken?”

“Hmm, Elder Brother, although they have begun to move…they do not appear to be preparing for battle.”

“Hmm…”

The 500 skeletons which had begun to move formed into ten ranks.

“Just what are they planning to do?”

As if the skeleton army had been waiting for this question to be asked, they once again began to move.

Under perfect and precise commands, the legion parted to either side from the center. What appeared from the gap of approximately 20 skeletons in width was...a figure.

That figure was not very large. Even if it was about 250 cm in height, it was possible to see that the figure was shorter than Zaryusu.

That person wore a pitch-black robe, and gave off a terrifying aura. He wore a similar attire to the powerful Lich from yesterday's battle, therefore likewise, this opponent should also be a magic caster.

However, there was a decisive difference between the two, that being their strength.

Seeing that figure, Zaryusu felt his back getting the shivers. His instinct was telling him that if he were to compare this person who had just appeared to yesterday's Lich, the difference in their strength would be like that of a baby to a warrior.

Even if the distance between them

was so large, it was still possible to be affected by that terrifying freezing aura emitted from that person's entire body. Not only that, but the opponent's equipment was also of a different class.

As if it was impossible to resist death—an absolutely dominating image.

"Is that...an Overlord of Death?"

Zaryusu could not resist speaking out the most appropriate description of this creature, and these words completely hit the point.

That person was an Overlord which dominated over death.

"...Oh, oh!"

What exactly was this Overlord of Death attempting to do?

The Lizardmen which were nervously watching this Magic Caster let out a panicked sound altogether. At this moment, an enormous hemisphere-shaped magic array approximately ten meters in diameter expanded outward with the magic caster at the center.

A blue and white radiance floated on the surface of the magic array, with semi-translucent markings which looked like it could be words or symbols. Those semi-translucent markings were rapidly changing, and at any given moment none of the words were the same.

Being unable to understand what exactly it was, Zaryusu felt confused.

When a magic caster was casting magic, one would not project it into the air like he did with the magic array. The opponent's current movements were already beyond Zaryusu's area of knowledge, therefore he turned to the female Lizardman here who was the most familiar with magic and asked:

"What exactly is that?"

"I-I don't know. I cannot figure out what that is either—"

Crusch's reply was a bit terrified. It looked like she was even more frightened because she possessed

knowledge about magic yet was unable to understand that behavior.

Just at the moment that Zaryusu was planning to comfort her...

Not knowing if the magic had successfully activated, the magic array broke apart, becoming numerous light particles flying towards the sky. In the next instant —like there had been an explosion in the sky, the particles spread out—

And the lake...completely froze.

Not a single person could understand what exactly had happened.

Shasuryu who was a tribe leader with outstanding qualifications; Crusch who had extraordinary

druid powers; even Zaryusu the traveler who had seen much and had a wide breadth of knowledge. Even these individuals, who within Lizardmen history could be considered to possess miraculous abilities, could not immediately comprehend the current situation.

No way of understanding why their own feet were inside ice.

Before long—after enough time had passed for the brain to accept the situation before their eyes—a crying rang out—

Every Lizardmen—indeed, everybody let out a lamenting cry.

Even Zaryusu was the same. Crusch and Shasuryu, and even the most

courageous Zenberu, were no exception. As if terror crept out from the depths of their souls, everybody could not help but scream.

This fact laid out before their eyes was simply too terrifying. The lake, which absolutely would never freeze over, which had never frozen over ever since the moment of their birth, was apparently frozen solid.

The Lizardmen frantically lifted their feet. Luckily the layer of ice was not thick, and broke immediately, but the broken areas immediately froze up again. A chilling cold vapor came from underneath, making it painfully obvious that this sight was not an illusion.

After Zaryusu nervously clambered up the mud wall, he immediately surveyed the surroundings, then was stunned into silence by what he saw from his widened point of view.

Everything in his field of vision was completely frozen over.

Indeed, it was inconceivable to imagine that such an enormous lake would be entirely frozen solid. However, this radiating ice which covered everything in sight was also reality.

One corner of Zaryusu's mind was also worried about the situation of his fish farm, but now was not the time to be worried about such things.

“That can’t be...”

Crusch, who had also climbed up, looked around and was lost for words just like Zaryusu. From her gaping mouth, she let out a despairing voice.

Like Zaryusu, she did not wish to believe that this scene she saw before her was real.

“Monster!”

She cursed loudly, while at the same time wishing that swearing and cursing would mitigate her internal fear.

“Get up here, quick!”

The older brother Shasuryu bellowed.

Several Lizardmen had already toppled over. The remaining warriors who were still able to move cooperated together, helping to pull up their collapsed companions from the frozen ground.

Those Lizardmen who were being helped up had pale faces and were shivering constantly. The cold gas which wafted upward probably had robbed them of their vitality.

“Elder Brother, I’ll go check on the others!”

Zaryusu who wielded Frost Pain could not be affected by this degree of influence from the cold air.

“No... Do not go!”

“Why, Elder Brother?!”

“The enemy will probably start moving in a short moment. You are not permitted to leave! Grasp the overall situation, do not let any information slip! This is something which can only be entrusted to you who have wandered across the world and acquired various kinds of knowledge.”

Shasuryu’s eyesight moved away from Zaryusu and turned to speak to all of the surrounding warrior-class Lizardmen.

“Right now I will be casting some ice resistance magic upon you all, 「Ice Protection」11. Quickly go and inform every single person in the village, and avoid coming into

contact with the ice."

"I will also assist with casting the magic."

"Please do! Then, Crusch, let us act separately. If any individual is discovered to be in an emergency situation, immediately cast healing magic!"

Crusch and Shasuryu began to cast defensive magic on the unharmed Lizardmen.

Zaryusu remained on top of the mud wall, and looked toward the enemy's position with sharp eyes, making sure to grasp the opponent's every single movement. It was imperative to carry out the task given to him by his brother

with perfection.

“Hey ho.”

Zenberu who had climbed up to Zaryusu’s side gazed leisurely at the enemy’s position.

“You need to relax a bit. Your older brother is looking forward to your wisdom right? Even if you miss something, he won’t blame you. The more important thing is to not be too hooked up in it, and end up narrowing your vision.”

Zenberu in his carefree voice had given Zaryusu a sharp warning.

Just like with that battle with the Lich, everyone should cooperate and divide up the labor, and focus on their own role to the best of

their ability.

Zaryusu surveyed the surroundings and discovered that warrior-class Lizardmen had also likewise climbed on top of the mud wall to observe the enemy. Correct, he was not here to fight a war by himself, but to fight shoulder to shoulder with everyone.

It seemed that he who had witnessed that overwhelming power —magic—had been shaken.

Zaryusu exhaled one giant breath, as if to get rid of his internal worries all in one go.

“Sorry.”

“There’s nothing to be sorry about.”

“...That’s right, because you, Zenberu, are also here.”

“Ha, don’t look to me for matters which concern thinking.”

The two of them laughed at each other, then continued to observe the enemy’s movement.

“However, that really is a true monster.”

“Yeah! It is basically on a completely different level...”

The Overlord of Death had the insufferably arrogant posture of a king, and pompously gazed in the direction of Zaryusu and their village. That supposedly quite small body seemed expanded by ten times its size.

"...He should be the one referred to as the Supreme One."

"That ought to be pretty spot on. Furthermore, I really hope there are no others powerful enough to cast magic that freezes the entire lake."

"That's right, and I hope so too. In the eyes of that monster who is even able to freeze the lake, we Lizardmen are no more than ants. Ah~ what a shame! We're no different than small insects. Speaking of which...there's movement."

The magic caster who froze the lake raised the hand which was not holding onto a staff, and gave a wave in the direction of the village. That action ought to be a command

given—Zaryusu felt as such, and in the next moment received a terrifying proof of it.

“Oh oh oh oh!”

The sound came from various parts from within the village.

“What is...that! What on earth is that?!”

After Zaryusu, who at this stage deeply believed that there was nothing more that could surprise him, saw the sight before his eyes, on reflex gave out an anguished cry.

What appeared before him was a two-armed, two-legged colossus which seemed to be carved out of stone.

There in its thick rock chest region lay a red light which shone just like a heartbeat. With thick hands and stubby legs, its stout body shape was even a bit cute, that was, if it was not over 30 meters in height.

This kind of gigantic rock figure suddenly appeared in the forest. Calling it an illusion would in fact be even easier to mentally accept.

The rock figure slowly began to move, and raised an enormous boulder from who knows where.

And then threw it.

Zaryusu involuntarily covered his eyes. Without a doubt, all those who collided with the giant boulder would be met with nothing but

absolute death.

In the darkness, Zaryusu heard the sounds of movement of surprised people, and an enormous sound of collision reached him. Even the mud wall began to shake violently.

This was followed by the sound of intense rain—the sound of rebounded gravel as it fell onto the ground, and the exclaiming of both adults and children from the village.

Although he was already accustomed to death, it was still intolerable for him to face such horror which exceeded imagination. The shocking lesson moments ago even caused those who had fought victoriously in the previous war to

shriek just like small children.

Comforting himself with the fact that he was still alive, Zaryusu exhaled and calmed himself down. After cautiously opening his eyes, what he saw reflected in his eyes was the sight of the undead army beginning to move, and the giant stone figure was nowhere to be seen.

In the wetlands between the two armies was the giant rock boulder which was nonexistent moments ago. The undead legion gathered close to the rock, raised their shields flatly above themselves before kneeling down. The other skeletons jumped on top of the raised shields, nimbly maintaining their balance then, like the

skeletons below, likewise raised their own shields.

At that moment, Zaryusu understood what the opponent was doing and, as if he had been struck by lightning, started trembling.

“Could it be...stairs? Apparently even this myth-like army is used as mere stairs!”

The skeletons approached the giant boulder at abnormal speed—and the stairs made out of the undead army units was finally completed.

Following this, the other undead soldiers also began to move. These undead were even more impressive-looking than the skeletons moments ago, and numbered

approximately one hundred. In their hands were spears with a piece of cloth attached, like the kind used by horseback spearmen.

Bright red cloth—all of their spear-flags had a single emblem.

Those undead wore cloaks billowing in the wind, and stepped into the wetlands one after another in perfect unison, advancing forward silently as they shattered the ice beneath their feet. This was followed by another group of skeletons which also entered the wetlands in perfect unison. The second group maintaining a fixed distance from the first group before stopping and crossing spears with each skeleton on the other side.

The crossed spears formed a single path leading directly to the large boulder.

“...Is that a path for the Overlord?”

Zenberu was correct.

The ‘death’ magic caster stepped on the path arranged by the undead, and following behind him were numerous figures who had seemingly appeared out of nowhere.

Leading the path was the magic caster whose extent of true strength had reached unfathomable heights.

On his body he wore a pitch-black chang pao, so dark that it looked as if it had been cut from a piece of the night, and in his hand he held a

staff which radiated a black aura. That radiating aura seemed to form into agonized human expressions, which collapsed and disappeared. Even under the hood was a skull, with vacant eye sockets which had a shining small red light in either of them.

The opponent wore innumerable magic accessories which were absolutely beyond Zaryusu's comprehension, and walked forward at a commensurate pace with the authority of a king.

There was a white-clothed woman following behind the Overlord of Death. Although she had a human appearance, there was one particular area which was different to humans. Namely, that was the

wings attached to her body at the waist.

“She can’t be...an Akuma?”

Akuma.

Demons were those who used violence to bring about destruction, and Devils were those who used their intelligence to bring about depravity. These kinds of otherworldly existences grouped together were referred to as demons. It was said that they were atrocious monsters which existed solely for the extermination of all sentient and good living beings. They were also synonymous with the word ‘evil’.

Zaryusu had once before heard

about demons during his travels.

He had heard how terrifying demons were. It was said that 200 years ago, a being known as the king of the demons—the Demon God—had led demons under his banner, and had almost exterminated the entire world.

The Demon God had met his end at the hands of the Thirteen Heroes which vanquished him, and in a certain place it was still possible to see traces of that battle.

If the undead could be described as creatures which detested the living, then demons were creatures which tormented the living.

A pair of Dark Elf twins followed

behind the demon, and behind them was a silver-haired girl. Not only that, there was also a bizarre creature floating in the air, and lastly there was a human-like male with a long tail.

Although the bizarre creature gave off an impression that it was not strong, a single glance of each of the others would cause tails to start to tremble. His feral instincts were fiercely warning him, saying it was crucial to quickly get away at full speed.

This line of people walked forward silently, passed through underneath the spear banners and climbed up the stairs leading to the giant boulder. Without hesitation, they stepped on the undead soldiers, and

stood on top of the giant boulder like royalty. The Overlord of Death, who walked in front, stretched out his hand and gave it a wave.

In the next moment, a high-back throne giving off a black radiance appeared, and the Overlord of Death directly proceeded to sit on top of it.

The ones which walked behind, which should be his trusted people, formed a line, and as if waiting for something they looked toward the village. However, apart from this, they did not make any other movements.

What kind of situation was this?

Several Lizardmen looked at each

other uncomfortably, and finally decided to allow the cleverest person at the scene to make a decisive judgement.

“...P-Please tell us, what we should do, Zaryusu-sama? Shall we prepare to flee?”

This speech was devoid of battle intent. Their powerless and drooped tails spoke volumes about how they felt inside.

“No, that will not be necessary. Think about the previous Lich. Our opponent is a magic caster who is by far more superior to that lich, and making an attack at this distance should be child’s play for him. The most frightening thing is...what kind of words does he have

for us."

The Lizardmen revealed expressions of agreement.

During this period of time, Zaryusu's gaze remained focused on a line people that had approached. Like a commoner looking at royalty, he did not stop observing the powerful creatures standing on top of the giant boulder.

This was so that he would not let any information slip his attention.

When the distance between them had closed, he could already make quite detailed observations, and it could even be said that they were close enough to exchange gazes.

Was the Overlord of Death seated on the throne observing the Lizardmen? The outward appearances of the Dark Elves did not show any hostile intent, the silver-haired girl had a mocking expression, the demon's gentle appearance conversely caused hairs to raise on end, it was completely impossible to see if the bizarre creature was up to anything, and the male who had grown a tail had no emotions in his eyes.

After exchanging observations like this for a while, the Overlord of Death once again gently raised the hand not holding a staff to the vicinity of his chest. Several Lizardmen who saw this action flickered their tails intensely.

“—Do not be afraid. Do not put an embarrassing display in front of our opponent.”

Zaryusu’s razor-sharp rebuke made all of the Lizardmen at the scene immediately raise their heads and straighten their backs.

A number of black clouds appeared in front of the Overlord of Death, numbering twenty. The black clouds spun ceaselessly, growing in size and each becoming approximately 150 cm in size. Before long, many horrifying faces appeared floating inside the black clouds.

“Those are…”

Zaryusu recalled that it was the

monster which had approached the village, and was also the same kind of undead monster which he had once come across during his travels.

Although he had already explained this in Crusch's village, unless they were to use magic weapons, weapons forged from special metals, magic or special martial arts, it would be exceedingly difficult to harm this kind of incorporeal creature.

Even when all of the Lizardmen tribes were aggregated, they only possessed a small number of magic weapons, which meant to say that even defeating one would be very difficult.

Not to mention that the opponent

had apparently summoned twenty of that kind of monster with great ease.

"...So, that's what it means to be able to control death itself."

Zaryusu despairingly thought to himself that the opponent was indeed a supremely powerful being able to have the powerful Lich swear loyalty to him.

After the Overlord of Death uttered some unknown words, he stretched out his hand and waved as if intending for everyone to attack. Following this, the monsters flew over, surrounded the village and began to chant in unison.

『The Supreme One transmits his

message to you as such.』

『The Supreme One requests a dialogue. Will the representative please step forward.』

『Should you waste our time, it shall only serve to aggravate the Supreme One.』

After this unilateral declaration, the incorporeal undead returned to their master's side.

"Ha...? It can't be... That is it?"

Zaryusu had a stumped look as he said this.

'So he sent out such powerful undead just to transmit this message?'

However, what was even harder to believe was when the silver-haired girl, who was waiting at attention at the back, forcefully used both hands to make a clap once she received her instructions from the supreme ruler of death.

At the moment of the hand clap—those undead were exterminated.

“What!”

Zaryusu, who had taken in a large shock, involuntarily shouted out.

Since that move was not to return the summoned monsters, but to exterminate them.

Priests could exterminate undead. Although normally sending them back was already not easy, if there

were two individuals and there was a great difference in strength, they could do more than make the undead retreat, and even directly exterminate them. However, to exterminate a group of undead at the same time was impossible.

What that meant was that the silver-haired girl's strength was on par with the Overlord of Death. If that was so, then the others by his side were fearfully also the same.

"Hahahaha—"

Zaryusu could not stop his own laughter.

This was natural. At this moment, what could he do other than laugh? If the difference in their strength

was as such—

“Younger Brother!”

“—Ah, Elder Brother!”

Zaryusu replied as he glanced toward the voice which came from underside of the mud wall, and discovered that both Shasuryu and Crusch had arrived at the wall. Both individuals climbed up the mud wall and looked in the direction of the magic caster’s entourage.

Crusch forcefully squeezed herself between Zenberu and Zaryusu, almost causing Zenberu to fall over. However, this should have counted as a forgivable action.

“Is that the enemy’s leader? The atmosphere around him is so

strong that merely looking at him will cause people's bones to chill. Although the appearance is similar to the Lich which you defeated...but the strength of both individuals simply cannot be compared..."

"...Elder Brother, have you finished on your side?"

"Mm, pretty much. My and Crusch's magic reserves have been depleted. Furthermore, after hearing that being's words... I also think that we must resolve this matter first. About what that being said... Zaryusu, are you willing to come along?"

Zaryusu looked silently at Shasuryu for a while, then nodded gravely. Shasuryu momentarily showed an

anguished look, but immediately returned to normal, so fast that nobody had noticed his expression.

“Sorry.”

“Don’t mind it, Elder Brother.”

Shasuryu had only apologized before jumping off the mud wall, treading on the thin layer of ice coating the wetlands, and letting out splashing sounds.

“I’m off then.”

“Be careful.”

After Zaryusu hugged Crusch tightly, he also followed Shasuryu and jumped down into the wetlands.

Zaryusu and Shasuryu treaded across the thin ice above the lake, moving forward together. After they walked through the main entrance, Zaryusu felt the Overlord of Death's group gaze intently at the two of them, as if their gazes carried actual pressuring strength. He desperately restrained his strong emotions telling him not to get away.

At this moment, Shasuryu spoke out.

"...Sorry."

"...Sorry for what, Elder Brother?"

"...If negotiations fall apart, the opponent may perhaps kill the two of us there and then."

Zaryusu had already prepared himself mentally a while ago. It was because of this that he had hugged Crusch so tightly first.

“...Considering the opponent’s numbers, I cannot allow Elder Brother to go forward alone. If you were by yourself, the opponent would probably also form the opinion that we are not paying them enough respect.”

Amongst Lizardmen, Zaryusu was indeed widely known, and extremely suitable to take part in negotiations. However, his identity was that of a traveler, therefore even if he were sacrificed, it would not affect the Lizardmen group structure. From this perspective, his loss would not be regretted.

Even if the hero were to be killed, so long as there were other remaining tribal chiefs, the battle could be continued. The only pity would be the loss of Frost Pain. Without it, there would be no means to block the cold wind coming from the frozen lake.

The two of them continued silently forward, getting step-by-step closer to death.

They arrived before the undead stairs leading up to the throne, and announced their arrival loudly. If the throne was situated even further back, they could have chosen to climb up the stairs first, but the opponent stood at the brink of the stairs, showing that they were not intended to climb up.

The king must sit at a higher level.

Although Lizardmen did not have such a rule, many tribes had the habit where those in a higher position would look down on others. Of course, from the perspective of holding talks, this was considered disrespectful treatment of the other party.

Therefore, while on the surface it was called negotiation, blatantly there was no intention for these negotiations to be conducted between equals.

However, requesting talks among equals would be overconfidence. Indeed, Zaryusu and the others had won the previous battle, but after seeing the rows of enemy soldiers

on top of the enormous boulder, they were forced to realize that their previous victory had no meaning even if they did not wish to believe so. All of it had been just a game.

“Our delegation has arrived! I am the Lizardmen representative, Shasuryu Shasha, the strongest hero amongst the Lizardmen!”

“I am Zaryusu Shasha!”

Even so, their sonorous voices still had no flattery in them. They knew that this was foolishness, but this was their remaining dignity. Perhaps the previous battle was only a game in the opponent’s eyes, but they absolutely could not forfeit the honor of those who sacrificed

their lives in that battle.

No response. The Overlord of Death seated on top of the throne merely looked critically at them, unceremoniously sizing them up. It was completely impossible to tell if there was any intent to take action.

The one who replied was the demon who had a pair of black wings which grew from her waist.

“Our master does not consider that you have not entered into a listening posture which demonstrates respect.”

“...What?”

Once the female heard the confused voice, she called out to the man by her side who had a tail.

“—Demiurge.”

“『Prostrate』.”

Suddenly, Zaryusu and Shasuryu knelt down, with their heads buried into the wetlands. Their actions made it look like these two people thought it was only natural to do.

The cold mud stained the two’s bodies, and the shattered ice blocks immediately froze up again.

It was impossible to stand up. Even if they used their entire bodies’ strength, their bodies did not budge. As if there was an invisible giant hand which was pressing down on them from above, their bodies had completely lost all freedom of movement.

“『Do Not Resist』.”

In the moment that the sound once again was heard in their heads, Zaryusu and Shasuryu felt as if their bodies had given birth to another mind—taking over their decision-making faculties. Their bodies seemed to act according to the instructions of those faculties.

After seeing the two energy-drained people awkwardly kneeling in the muddy ground, the female demon seemed to look very satisfied, and faced the master as she reported:

“Ainz-sama, their respectful listening postures are prepared.”

“Thank you for your hard work—Raise your heads.”

“『Permitted to Raise Your Heads』.”

Zaryusu and Shasuryu moved their heads which was the only body part able to freely move, and gazed upward as if respectfully welcoming a king.

“I am...the master of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, Ainz Ooal Gown. First, I give you my thanks for helping me complete my experiment.”

‘Experiment? So many of our companions’ lives were taken away, yet he still dares to call it an experiment?’

The despise in their hearts roused their burning anger, but then they

still restrained their emotions. It was because now was still not the time to turn the tables.

“Then, let us directly address the main issue...accept my authority.”

Ainz the magic caster gently raised his hand, stopping Shasuryu who desired to speak out.

Knowing that insisting on speaking out would not be wise, Shasuryu could only obediently stay silent.

“—However, you defeated us earlier, which should mean that you are unwilling to accept my authority. This is why we shall attack again four hours later. If you are still able to win, I promise to take no further action against you, and will even

guarantee to support reasonable compensation to you."

"...May I please ask a question?"

"You may, ask away."

"The one who will be attacking...will it be Your Excellency?"

The silver-haired girl standing at the back raised her brow slightly and the female demon smiled more deeply, possibly because they were unsatisfied with the 'Your Excellency' title. However, they did not make any particular action, perhaps because the master did not say anything about it.

Ainz ignored those two people, and continued talking.

“How can that be possible. I will not be taking action myself. Instead, the one who will be attacking will be my trustworthy aide...furthermore, I will only be sending out one person. He is called Cocytus.”

Hearing these words, Zaryusu felt a deep despair as if the world had ended.

If it were a large army that would attack, perhaps the Lizardmen would have a chance of victory. This meant that, at first, he had believed that this time could also be a continuation of yesterday’s unfortunate battle which was called an experiment. If it were like that, then there should still be a miniscule chance of victory.

However, it was not going to be a large army which was sent out to attack.

The one attacking would only be one person.

The previously defeated army had once again made such a big declaration, but would only send one person this time. Unless it was a punishment, or there was some hidden meaning behind his words, he must have complete faith in that person.

Someone who was trusted by the Overlord of Death who possessed overwhelming strength. Then, there could only be one answer: that person also possessed overwhelming strength, and

furthermore the kind of strength that would make Lizardmen feel that there was no chance of winning.

“We choose to surren...”

“Losing without a fight is simply too boring. Do put up a bit of a fight, we would also like to have a taste of victory.”

Ainz interrupted Shasuryu, not allowing him to continue.

‘So blatantly, he would make an example out of us, this bastard.’

Zaryusu cursed as such in his thoughts.

The powerful using slaughter to wipe away the shame of defeat.

What that meant was that in a moment the opponent would be carrying out a live sacrifice. It would be a performance, eradicating the rebellious Lizardmen.

“That is all that I wish to say. Then, four hours later, do your best to enjoy it.”

“Please wait a minute—will this ice melt away?”

Regardless of who won or lost, with the lake frozen, the Lizardmen would find it very difficult to survive.

“...Ah, I almost forgot.”

Saying that he had forgotten. This airy attitude of Ainz surfaced in his

reply.

“I only wished not to dirty myself with the wetland mud as I walked, which is why, after returning to the shore, the magic effect will be dispelled.”

“What!”

Zaryusu and Shasuryu were shocked into silence, and questioned if they had heard wrongly.

‘He froze the lake simply because he did not wish to get dirty?’

This was no longer at the level of being hard to believe. The opponent’s strength was simply too overwhelming, even able to easily change the force of nature, and

furthermore for such a silly reason.

So it turned out that they were opposing such a powerful being— Zaryusu and Shasuryu both felt the same fear as a child would being all alone.

“Until next time, Lizardmen— 「Portal」.”

Feeling that everything that needed to be said was said, Ainz stretched out his hand and gave it a gentle wave, a dark hemisphere appeared in front of the throne. Next, he jumped into that darkness.

“See you, Lizardmen.”

“Goodbye, Lizardman-san.”

“Farewell, Lizardmen.”

The two attending females and one male also jumped into the darkness after speaking with an attitude that was as if they had lost interest.

“E-Eh, t-then, goodbye, take care.”

“drows ym fo enob eht ma I [Then, goodbye].”

After the Dark Elf female, the bizarre creature also followed and entered the darkness.

“『Freedom Granted』. Then, try to enjoy it as best you can, Lizardmen.”

At the same moment the last one, the man with the tail, entered the darkness, he spoke with a gentle voice and also the weight pressing down on the two Lizardmen

disappeared without a trace.

Zaryusu and Shasuryu who were left behind in their spots were sprawled in the mud and did not move. This was because they lacked the strength to pull themselves up.

They no longer even felt pain from the continuous freezing wind, because they had suffered a mental attack which exceeded their physical pain by far.

“Damn it...”

Shasuryu cursed in a low voice, quite unlike his personality, and contained in it was a mix of many emotions.

The two were welcomed back by the various tribal chiefs who had

climbed on top of the mud wall in order to avoid the cold gas. There were no other Lizardmen in the surroundings.

Possibly, this was arranged because they had already considered early on that there were some matters which needed to be discussed in confidentiality. Shasuryu roughly thought that this was the case, and that there was no need to conceal it any further. He then directly informed everybody of what he had gathered about the progression of that meeting that hardly could be called a proper negotiation.

Nobody had too much of a reaction, except for being slightly alarmed, toward Shasuryu's explanation which was said in a heavy tone.

They were most likely like this because they had probably predicted the conclusion of the negotiation from a long while back.

“Understood…then the ice will melt, right? If it does not melt, then we won’t be able to fight even if we wanted to.”

“Not a problem. The opponent said that the magic would be dispelled.”

“Was this an exchange brought about by the negotiation?”

Towards the question posed by the Small Fang Tribe chief, Shasuryu did not reply, but merely smiled a little. Seeing that reaction, and understanding what it meant, the tribal chief of the Small Fang Tribe

shook his head disheartedly.

“When you were heading to the negotiations, we conducted an investigation…and discovered the shadows of enemies inside of the lake which look like skeleton soldiers. We fear that they are in a formation surrounding us and awaiting orders.”

“I do not think…our opponent…plans to let us go.”

“The opponent was quite serious, so this means…”

“That is only speculation.”

The four who had not participated in the negotiations gave a long sigh. The conclusion that they had reached should also be a belief that

what would follow was a live sacrificial ritual.

“Then what shall we do?”

“...Mobilize all warrior-class Lizardmen, and also...the ones here...”

“Elder Brother...can you permit only five people to participate?”

Out of the corner of his eye, Zaryusu saw the puzzled expression on Crusch’s face. He continued, appealing towards all of the male Lizardmen including his older brother.

“If the opponent’s objective is to demonstrate his own powerful strength, then the Lizardmen shouldn’t be exterminated

completely. Therefore, we need an individual who is able to lead, a central figure to bring together all of the survivors. If all of the people here were to lose their lives, it would be a huge loss for the future of Lizardmen."

"...That is a valid point. Isn't that right, Shasuryu."

"Hmm, Zaryusu...is correct."

The two tribal chiefs alternatively looked at Zaryusu and Crusch, then both expressed their agreement.

"—There's nothing unacceptable with that; I also agree."

After the approval of the final tribal chief Zenberu, Shasuryu could not find any reasons to refuse his

younger brother's request.

"Our decision is thus settled then. I have also thought about it, that it is necessary to have someone survive to lead and bring together the tribes —Crusch should be very suitable to carry out this responsibility. Her albinism may perhaps be a hindrance, but her abilities as a druid are indispensable."

"Wait a moment. I also want to fight together!"

Crusch shouted loudly, protesting why she was excluded now out of all times.

"Furthermore, if we were to leave one person behind, wouldn't leaving behind Shasuryu be better?

He is the most trusted tribal leader amongst us!"

"And that is exactly why we cannot leave him behind. The opponent's objective is to demonstrate overwhelming force, probably in hopes that we will despair, so that we will submit to his authority easier. However, what would happen if there was someone amongst the survivors they could pin their hopes on, hmm?"

"And...amongst the tribal chiefs present, the one with the lowest popularity is Crusch."

Crusch was speechless. It was an indisputable fact that she as an albino had the lowest popularity.

Knowing that nothing she said would convince them, Crusch fixated on Zaryusu.

“I also want to go together. When you called me here, you had already decided let me make my own decision, so why do you still say such words?”

“...Because at that time, everybody would very likely all be killed, but now we have a relatively large opportunity to allow one person to survive.”

“Don’t joke with me!”

The air was shaking as if it were echoing Crusch’s anger. Because of her agitated emotions, the sound of the mud wall being slapped

numerous times could be heard as Crusch's tail went into an uncontrollable frenzy.

"—Zaryusu, you convince her. See you again in four hours' time."

Shasuryu threw down these words before departing quickly with long strides, followed by the sound of shattering ice and splashing water. Three tribal chiefs jumped down the mud wall and followed Shasuryu. Zenberu also had his back toward the two as he waved his hand gently to give his regards.

After seeing them off, Zaryusu turned to face Crusch.

"Crusch, please understand."

"How can I understand! And it is

not a given that you will lose! If you had the support of my druid powers, perhaps you may win!"

This sentence was so hollow that even Crusch who said it did not believe in it herself.

"I do not wish for my loved female Lizardmen to be killed. Please fulfil this foolish male Lizardman's desire."

Crusch showed a pained expression, and hugged Zaryusu.

"You're too selfish!"

"Sorry..."

"You might die."

"Uh huh..."

Indeed, the chance of surviving was incredibly low. No, rather it could be said with certainty that there was no chance of surviving.

“In just one short week, you’ve already captured my heart, yet you still tell me to watch helplessly as you get killed?”

“Um…”

“Meeting you was my stroke of luck, but also my misfortune.”

Crusch who was hugging Zaryusu’s torso tightened her grip, as if she had no intentions of letting go.

Zaryusu made no noise.

What should he say?

What could he say?

His thoughts all along had been stuck on the same problem.

After a period of time, Crusch raised her head, with her expression filled with determination.

Zaryusu felt uncomfortable in his heart as he sensed that Crusch would be adamant about coming along. At this moment, Crusch spoke a few words concisely to Zaryusu.

“—Get me pregnant.”

“—Hah?”

“Come quick!”

Chapter 5: The Freezing God

Part 1

Ainz's main base was the fortress

that Aura was constructing—the place that Cocytus visited yesterday. Faint construction noises could still be heard in the distance.

When they entered a room, Victim who had been following quietly behind said to Ainz.

“emoh gniog m’I ,syug uoy wercS... [Well then, allow me to bid farewell here].”

“Thank you for your hard work. Please defend the 1st Floor of Nazarick until we return.”

“amabO sknahT... [By your will].”

“「Portal」.”

Victim went into the door of darkness conjured by Ainz—with

the 1st Floor of the Great Tomb of Nazarick as his destination.

After seeing off the Guardian capable of activating a deadly powerful movement-restriction skill, Ainz turned his attention toward the room. At the same time, he could sense Aura lowering her face.

She must have done everything she could to give Ainz a grand welcome. Traces that showed the commendable effort put into this room could be seen everywhere, but it paled in comparison to Nazarick. Aura probably felt shame from this.

It was not that bad.

For Ainz who was just a salaryman,

he didn't mind it that much. His room in Nazarick wasn't too bad either, but it troubled him as it was too luxurious. In fact, he felt relaxed and comfortable here.

'I want an eight tatami room. I should find a corner to prepare one. Oh, I have to compliment Aura and convey my satisfaction for her work.'

If people didn't talk about their trust, gratitude and care, they wouldn't become successful.

Ainz remembered a quote he saw framed inside the display cabinet of a CEO during a corporate visit. He didn't know who coined it, but it was a great quote. It felt like something an ideal boss would say.

‘You have to show your gratitude. People won’t strive for the best if there is no reward… Something like that?’

“My apologies Aura, for insisting on using this place. Do not mind the details, I have high praise for what you have accomplished. If this is made by you, then it is as good as Nazarick.”

“…Yes.”

Aura’s eyes slightly widened. ‘I should console her more.’ Although Ainz wanted to do that, no better words came to his mind, so he covered it up by observing the surroundings once again.

The smell of fresh timber still

lingered here.

Normally, instead of this place that had absolutely no defenses, returning to Nazarick was unquestionably safer. Without defensive magic, it was like a house made of paper in a way. But on the flip side, Ainz was using himself as bait to lure in the big fish.

There was a large distance between here and the lake, so the ones that could chase them here—if they existed—would be players from YGGDRASIL, or people at that level.

This meant that the purpose of building this place was to bait the enemies targeting Nazarick to reveal themselves.

It was dangerous of course, but Ainz felt the risk was necessary to achieve this goal.

'They are still not showing up. Could it be...the plan is a failure? Anyway, what is that?'

"...Aura, I want to ask you. What is that thing?"

Ainz's gaze stopped on the lone white chair placed deep inside the room. The back was made high and imposing. It was made so well that it was no exaggeration to call it an art piece. If he ignored that one glaring issue.

"It's bit plain, but I have prepared a throne."

The one answering confidently was

the subordinate following behind him—Demiurge. 'That's what I thought,' Ainz said to himself in his mind and asked a further question.

"—What bones did you use?"

"Bones from all sorts of beasts. The best parts are from beasts like Griffons and Wyverns."

"...Oh...I see."

It was a throne made from countless bones. It wasn't in the logistics list of goods they brought from Nazarick, so it was something Demiurge made outside. No matter how he looked at it, skulls from humans or demi-humans were definitely used too. It might look pure white without a shred of blood

and meat on it, but it still gave the feeling of blood stains.

It was a bit disgusting, sitting on that thing was akin to sitting on a cushion of needles, making Ainz hesitate. But his subordinate had put in effort to prepare it, it would be difficult to reject it. Was there any reason he could use that wouldn't cause complaints...

Ainz snapped his fingers after thinking about it.

"...Shalltear. I will give you the punishment for what you had done right now. That's right... I will punish you with shame."

"Yes!"

Shalltear who was suddenly named

was a bit surprised.

“Kneel with your head bowed over there, and put your hands on the floor.”

“Yes!”

Shalltear walked to the place Ainz pointed at—which was the middle of the room and did as she was told with a baffled face.

Ainz walked up to Shalltear and sat on her back.

“...Ainz, Ainz-sama!”

The surprised Shalltear could only exhale while whispering ‘Hans-sama’. She was shaken and stiff from fear when Ainz sat on her back.

“You are now a chair, understand?”

“Yes!”

Ainz shifted his gaze from Shalltear whose voice was getting shrill, onto Demiurge.

“—Sorry Demiurge, that’s how it is.”

“I see! Marvelous! To use a Guardian as a chair! This is a chair customized specifically for the Supreme Master! As expected of Ainz-sama. I would never have thought of that!”

“Is-Is that so…”

In the face of the glittering respect shown on Demiurge that he was expressing, Ainz averted his face, not understanding why he was

smiling so brilliantly. After this, a beautiful woman said to Ainz with a wonderful smile.

“My apologies Ainz-sama. Please allow me to excuse myself. I will return shortly.”

“You need something Albedo? Permission granted, carry on.”

After thanking him, Albedo left the room. Immediately, a woman screaming ‘Hyaaahhhhhhh!’ and the sound of a wall being smashed violently could be heard, and the whole fort seemed to be shaking.

After a minute or so, Albedo returned to the room dominated by silence with her usual smile.

“I have returned, Ainz-sama. Oh

right, Aura. I accidentally ran into the wall when I left the room. It seemed to be damaged, could you repair it later? I am very sorry."

"Ah, ermm... Okay, I will get it done."

Ainz swallowed the words he wanted to say and sighed. He focused his wandering gaze and fixated on the staff emitting an aura of terror.

The real Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown was not brought here, this was a replica—a prototype in replicating the Guild weapon. Made from parts dug from the depths of the treasury, it was a prop that looked almost perfect on the outside.

The guild would fall if the Guild weapon was destroyed, so it could not be brought out so carelessly. It was entrusted to the Guardian of the Cherry Blossom Zone in the 8th Floor for protection right now.

‘We did come up with countermeasures for if we got robbed of our rings, but it is not easy to just find a place...to test it out...’

As he was thinking about that, Shalltear suddenly fidgeted, adjusting herself for Ainz to sit more comfortably. This made Ainz look down at the back of Shalltear’s head with a strange sense of unease.

Her breathing was ragged.

‘It must be heavy for her.’ Under Ainz was the slim back of Shalltear who looked to be fourteen. A grown man was sitting on the back of this young girl. Realizing how perverted, shameful and cruel that was, Ainz felt he might have gone too far.

Shalltear was a NPC created by his companion in the past. Even Peroronchino wouldn’t abuse her like this. This action was akin to soiling the memories of his past comrades. It was foolish to think of this as a self-punishment.

‘To torture Shalltear like this...unforgivable.’

“Shalltear, does it hurt?”

Ainz was planning to say ‘if that is

so, let's end this'. Shalltear looked up with a face blushing with passion, her expression full of pleasure.

"It's not painful at all! This is like a reward!"

She kept exhaling the heat stored within her body, reflecting Ainz's face in her dazed eyes. Her wet tongue brushed against her lips, reflecting light lecherously. She squirmed her body like a snake.

"...Hnngh!"

Ainz felt the urge to get away immediately.

He almost gave in to this urge.

'No, I can't do that.'

He was punishing Shalltear, but Shalltear's mistake was actually Ainz's sfault. That was why enduring the urge to get up was Ainz's spunishment.

Ainz destroyed the complicated emotions welling up within him.

He tried his best to ignore the chair that was panting and squirming. But he couldn't help thinking, 'Peroronchino, what a perverted setting this is.'

"...Well then, let's move on to the serious topic. Did we intimidate them?"

"I think it was perfect, Ainz-sama."

"Exactly, just look at the Lizardmen's faces."

Ainz smiled in relief after hearing what the Guardians said. Actually, it was impossible to tell the changes in the expressions of the Lizardmen. They might be closer to humans than reptiles, but their facial expressions were totally different from humans.

“Is that so. Then the first phase to awe them with might is a success.”

Ainz exhaled in relief.

He used the Super-tier magic 「The Creation」 that could only be used four times a day after all. If that didn’t work, nothing else would.

“Demiurge, how long would it take to find out exactly how large the frozen area is?”

“We have already started to do so, but progress is slow as the area is wider than expected. Please grant us more time.”

Ainz stopped Demiurge who was about to kneel. Ainz covered his mouth with his bony finger and thought. The area of effect being larger than expected could be considered a success in terms of magical experimentation.

「The Creation」 was a Super-tier magic that could change the terrain itself. In YGGDRASIL, it was used to guard against the heat of volcanoes or the cold of freezing lands.

It was possible to show their might without using Super-tier magic.

Unrelated to this deployment, Ainz had always wanted to perform this experiment in determining the area of effect. 「The Creation」 was a magic that had an amazingly large area of effect, and could cover the entire 8th Floor in Ainz's experiment inside Nazarick. But it wasn't clear what effect it would have on the world outside.

In YGGDRASIL the spell effect could cover an 'Area', but how big would an 'Area' be in this world? Ainz wanted to find out. If it could cover an entire plain, that would be too big.

Similarly, freezing the entire lake was going overboard. Care should be taken when using Super-tier magic.

“Aura, how is our security net?”

“Yes! We have deployed the undead assigned by Ainz-sama to secure a 2-kilometer radius. But there has been no signs of anything special coming in so far. I have also sent monsters specializing in scouting to patrol the area within 4 km, but we have not spotted anything suspicious.”

“I see... The enemy might be hiding from detection as they draw close, what about the countermeasures against that?”

“There are no problems. With Shalltear’s cooperation, we have sent out undead proficient in reconnaissance.”

“Splendid.”

Aura smiled happily after Ainz praised her. Her depressed expression was gone without a trace.

“We have exposed ourselves to this extent, why haven’t the people who used the World-class item against Shalltear made a move?”

Ainz asked again under the gazes of everyone present, but did not direct his question to anyone in particular.

“Why aren’t they performing surveillance on Nazarick and this place?”

“Could it be that they are surveilling us with World-class items that could not be detected by

normal means?”

Ainz tilted his head in response to Demiurge’s counter question.

“...I did consider this possibility, that’s why I use Momon... If they are really using World-class items to spy on us, they wouldn’t be able to spy on Momon who also owns a World-class item. That’s why I have been assuming they will use physical means such as scouts to watch us... They might use magic surveillance too, but it should be orthodox means...”

Ainz realized the Guardians around him seemed confused, which meant his explanation wasn’t clear enough.

“Well... How should I put this... In the past, we owned a mine that could generate a type of metal that was rare. As we were monopolizing the supply, the market price for it soared and people started scheming to rob it from us. The item they used that time was Ouroboros. It was a top World-class item known as one of the 《Twenty》.”

Ainz narrowed his eyes.

He was raging mad when he just got robbed, but looking back, it was a nice piece of memory. Even though they were massacred and dropped plenty of rare items.

“Outrageous! They dared usurp the territory ruled by the Supreme Rulers?! Unforgivable! Please give

us the order to counterattack!”

Hearing how angry Albedo was made Ainz turn his gaze.

He could see the hostility and killing intent released by all the Guardians, even the calm Demiurge was revealing a sinister smile. Not just that, even Mare’s reserved expression couldn’t conceal his urge to attack. Ainz couldn’t see Shalltear’s face as she was acting as a chair, but from her stiffened body, her determination was conveyed to Ainz through his rear.

“Calm down! This is all in the past now.”

Ainz raised his hand to calm the Guardians. They looked more

settled, but they still felt unstable as if magma was flowing beneath the surface. To change the topic, Ainz continued what he was saying.

“The enemy used Ouroboros to stop us from entering the ‘World’ the mine was situated in. They probably used this chance to search the vicinity and seize the mine. When the seal was undone, we went in only to find that the mine had been conquered.”

During the rash attempt to take back the mine, about half the guild members died at least once. Ainz held back and didn’t say this out loud.

“I will get to the main point. I mentioned that we were denied

access to that ‘World’ but people with World-class items could still enter that ‘World’. Hence, it is impossible for them to spy on us even with the strongest World-class items.”

As Ainz listened to the enlightened acknowledgement from his subordinates, he still bore doubts on whether this was really true.

The possibility was high, but there was no evidence to prove that it was true.

When using 《Conflict of the Five Elements》 which was also a 《Twenty》 like 《Ouroboros》, the game company sent a message to the owners of World-class items. Aside from an apology, they also

sent an item as compensation. The content of the apology message was: “Bearers of World-class items, by right, you should be exempted from any changes to the world. But it is very challenging to maintain your data while we update the server. Therefore, we have no other choice but to treat this as an exceptional case as we update the server.”

And so, it was impossible for them to defend against this. But that event should be the exception instead of the norm.

Especially the World-class item that could defend against reconnaissance magic. It would be meaningless if it couldn’t protect Nazarick from other World-class

items.

“And that is why I thought the enemy would approach Momon... But those who do approach are mothers carrying newborn babies and adventurers.”

They asked Momon to pat the babies’ heads to bless them with health and strength. The adventurers requested a handshake and wished to become stronger, but no one wanted to converse with him in private.

That was why Ainz exposed himself with weak defenses this time, waiting for the enemy to make their move.

Not equipping Cocytus with a

World-class item was part of the plan. Ainz planned to use him as bait to lure the enemy out. It seemed scary because the enemy was unknown, and they could come up with proper countermeasures after ascertaining who the enemy was.

“Regarding this issue... May I share my humble opinion?”

“What is it, Albedo?”

“Yes, as Ainz-sama explained, the plan was to smoke the enemy out. Could the enemy be reluctant to approach us since they too are operating in the dark, just like us?”

‘...Ah.’

“No...problem, Albedo, I already

considered that possibility.”

He didn’t. Ainz was assuming the enemy was thinking the same thing as him, trying to gather intelligence on him.

‘... What an error. Did I get it wrong from the very beginning?’

“Excuse me, also...”

‘Albedo-san, please stop’—Ainz cried in his heart. He felt like a candidate who was reviewing the question script after the exam and realized all his answers were wrong.

“About releasing the information that Shalltear was defeated with items...”

“Yes, that’s what I reported to the

guild, that is to prevent the people from fearing Momon if he gets too powerful. Sealed magic crystals seem to be a rare item here, it must be difficult to destroy the crystal for experiments. Destabilizing the crystal and using it to defeat Shalltear is a more convincing story, and people would be less guarded against Momon."

"You are absolutely right. For the people who think sealed crystals are rare, this isn't a bad method."

Albedo's roundabout way of speaking made Ainz feel uneasy.

"...But if the other party possesses multiple crystals like Ainz-sama, wouldn't the situation be different?"

“...Hmm? Ah, that’s what you mean.”

Ainz made an enlightened expression, but didn’t understand at all.

So what if the other party possesses several sealed crystals? It was a fact that sealed magic was valuable in this world. Was Albedo worried about the crystal being broken during experiments?

But that didn’t seem to be it all.

An ominous feeling flashed across Ainz’s smind. He wanted Albedo to explain further, which made Ainz hate himself for acting cocky earlier.

‘Is it really okay for me to be the

ruler and decide the policies of Nazarick? Am I steering a ship up a mountain without knowing it?'

Ainz felt like running away.

He couldn't bear the burden of a ruler he had experienced several times—a burden that grew heavier in the face of failure—Ainz kept complaining in his heart.

But he couldn't do that. Since he took the name of Ainz Ooal Gown, he couldn't abandon the creations of his comrades—the NPCs and the treasures in the Great Tomb of Nazarick. More importantly, he didn't want to be a parent that abandoned his children.

'I also worry whether you all will

betray, abandon or give up on me. Nonetheless, I will act the part of Ainz Ooal Gown that meets your expectations and is worthy of your trust.'

And so, Ainz made a relaxed expression he practiced before the mirror and said in a pose filled with the confidence of an Overlord.

"No problem, I understand why you feel uneasy."

Ainz then looked around him.

"Albedo... Do share your worries with the other Guardians."

"Ah, yes! If the enemy possesses multiple crystals like Ainz-sama... Someone who knows about crystals, they would be able to tell this

information is false. They will be sure that Shalltear was not defeated by the crystal—although they couldn't know if Shalltear was at full strength, users of World-class items will assume that Momon is as strong as Shalltear. They will then conclude the mysterious warrior Momon who suddenly appeared in E-Rantel is someone dangerous right? They might also suspect that Shalltear might be related to Momon..."

"...Albedo, and Guardians, what do you think the enemies' next step would be?"

"Pardon me. I think that if our foes plan to oppose Ainz-sama, they will spread rumors of Momon working together with the vampire even if

there is no proof. They would not want Momon to gain further fame."

'Urghhh'—Ainz moaned in his heart.

Part of the goal of going to E-Rantel was to gather intelligence, but the main target was to raise the fame of the Momon persona—and a tiny part of wanting to run away. The original plan was to wait for the great hero to be born and then reveal Momon's true identity, turning all his fame to that of Ainz Ooal Gown, spreading this name throughout the world.

He also wanted to show his PK guild would change in this world, so he did good deeds using the name of Momon. But these plans were

probably done for.

“Hmm? Demiurge, let me ask you, would it be more effective if such rumors were spread after Momon became famous?”

“Aura, that would be a bad move. If Ainz-sama has garnered enough fame, the masses will just think of such news as malicious rumors. They should cut off the roots before his fame grows.”

“A wonderful insight, Demiurge.”

Ainz nodded in response to Demiurge who was bowing his head, acting as if he had the same idea.

“I will ask another question. If that is so, why hasn’t the enemy started

spreading rumors yet?”

After hearing Ainz’s squery, Demiurge raised a finger.

“Number one, they have not completed their investigation on Momon-sama yet. If Momon-sama did defeat Shalltear in a straight fight, they wouldn’t want to incur his wrath. They might want to pull him into their camp. Number two—”

He raised another finger.

“What if their encounter with Shalltear was just a coincidence? They might have been passing by with some other purpose in mind, just some unrelated third party.”

“That is impossible, Demiurge, the possibility is very low...”

Ainz said that, he just realized this scenario wasn't impossible.

He was totally convinced that the attack had been targeted at Shalltear—or targeted at the denizens of Nazarick. But Shalltear was attacked shortly after teleporting. If the attack really had been targeted at Shalltear, they had been eerily precise.

Was he blinded by the fear of the unseen enemy?

Ainz narrowed his eyes—or rather, the red glow in his eye sockets.

In the end, the problem was insufficient intelligence and being shorthanded. They needed more power.

‘Anyway, the biggest problem is that our intelligence network is too small.’

Sebas had been tasked with that too, but the intelligence gathered by a handful of agents was limited. In the beginning, he thought it would be enough to gain basic information about this world, but that wasn’t enough in the current situation.

The intelligence gathered by an adventurer and the butler of a merchant had less importance and quality than that of a high government official.

Ainz couldn’t think of anyone who could analyze the gathered intel from different angles and judge

whether the intel was important.

“Ara ara, the main problem is the lack of intel. We had to be wary of an enemy we couldn’t see, which made it hard for us to make our move...”

After listening to Ainz’s complaint, Demiurge smiled as if he had a great idea.

“If that is the case, how about joining forces with a country?”

After a short silence, Albedo said ‘Oh’ to express that she had understood. Ainz made the same sound moments later.

“I see Demiurge, that’s what you mean.”

But the other three Guardians were still tilting their heads in confusion. Aura admitted her doubts honestly.

“Ainz-sama, what does this mean?”

Facing Aura’s question, Ainz felt relieved that he couldn’t show any facial expression.

“Ara ara... Mare, Shalltear, do you understand what Demiurge is talking about?”

The two of them shook their heads.

”I see, it couldn’t be helped. Demiurge, please explain.”

“Yes, by your will. Everyone, Ainz-sama is worried about this unknown enemy. I think that if we encounter this strong enemy and

both sides are openly hostile to each other, we will need a breakthrough point that could solve our issues during negotiations."

'Sensei, I don't understand'—Three students and one adult seemed to have these words carved on their faces. Demiurge-sensei12 seemed to realize his explanation was too vague, and continued by accommodating the standards of his students.

"What will you do if Ainz-sama is controlled by a World-class item user?"

"I will cut that person into pieces."

"...No, that's not what I mean, Aura. Don't you think that being

controlled is a breakthrough point? In actual fact, there are people who could control their opponent with World-class items, so the possibility of Ainz-sama being controlled is not zero."

The assistant homeroom teacher Albedo added to Demiurge-sensei's explanation.

"He means after pretending to join under the flag of a country, Nazarick could use this as an excuse for any actions we take in the future. We can just say that we are acting under the orders of that country and didn't have a choice. If the powerful enemy really exists, we could shift the responsibility to that country, correct? If the enemy doesn't want a direct confrontation,

they will do their best to accommodate us."

"I see...if there are people who are unhappy with them, we can use this excuse to pull this third party to our side... That's the idea. As expected of Ainz-sama..."

Just like the boss of an evil organization stroking a cat on his lap, Ainz patted the head of Shalltear who was acting as a chair as he said 'It's not me'.

"The one who came up with this plan wasn't me, but Demiurge. He should be the one who deserves this praise."

"No, you flatter me. Ainz-sama seems to have reached this

conclusion before I did."

"Ah, well yeah. My apologies for seemingly snatching your credit. And on top of that, it will be much easier for us to garner intelligence."

A country should already have an intelligence network in place. They would be able to progress by leaps and bounds just by sending a minion of Nazarick in.

After learning his advice was of use to Ainz and Ainz's manner of speech as if he was confirming the two brilliant Guardians made Demiurge smile.

"It is just as you said."

Ainz knew that Demiurge was implying that Ainz knew from the

very beginning.

“Ah, as expected of Ainz-sama, to have thought about this so thoroughly... Hmmm... So lowly beings like humans could be of use too.”

After Albedo commented, the other Guardians—including Shalltear who was relegated to being a chair—showered Ainz with sparkling gazes of admiration.

It made Ainz feel uneasy, but he felt relief that he didn’t get it wrong when the two of them agreed with him.

“Well then...let’s target a country.”

“If we consider the nations in the vicinity, it would be the Kingdom,

the Empire and the Theocracy."

"Wha-What about countries further away? Such as the Republic and the Holy Kingdom."

"I would advise against choosing nations that are far away, and I don't want to come into contact with the Theocracy before I have adequate intelligence about them. That leaves the Kingdom and the Empire... And from the intelligence gathered by Sebas, the Kingdom isn't that appealing to me, but...we will need to research this further."

Ainz extended his hand toward the mirror after saying, "By the way."

"We gave the Lizardmen a bit of time, let's see whether anything

unexpected is happening."

The bird's eye view of the Lizardmen's village appeared on the Mirror of Remote Viewing, with tiny spots moving around.

Ainz reached out toward the mirror and gestured, changing the scenery on the mirror.

The first time of course, was to zoom in.

The sight of the Lizardmen working hard to prepare for war was shown completely.

"Futile efforts."

Demiurge murmured at the Lizardmen gently.

‘Let me see, where are they. It’s hard to tell the Lizardmen apart.’

Ainz searched for the six Lizardmen he had seen in the recording with a frown on his face.

‘Hmmm—found the armored one. That’s the one that threw rocks, right? Next, the buster sword is here. The differences are too minute. It is easy to find those with prominent colors or equipment... Found the one with the prominent arm.’

After observing that, Ainz kept shifting the image on the mirror.

“...I don’t see the white Lizardman and the one holding the magic weapon.”

“Ermm…the one called Zaryusu?”

“Ah, right, that’s his name.”

Ainz recalled the Lizardman who had come forth to negotiate at Aura’s prompting.

“Could he be inside the houses?”

“Probably.”

But the Mirror of Remote Viewing wasn’t able to see inside buildings. That was the case, normally.

“Demiurge, Infinity Haversack please.”

“By your will.”

Demiurge bowed and moved to the table in the corner of the room and

picked up the Infinity Haversack. He presented it to Ainz respectfully. Ainz took out one scroll from within.

He then activated the magic within the scroll.

An invisible, ethereal sensory organ was conjured. The sensory organ couldn't penetrate magical barriers, but it could pass through normal walls regardless of their thickness. If it couldn't get in, it meant that a powerful enemy they had to be wary of was there.

After linking the sensory organ with the Mirror of Remote Viewing so the Guardians could also see, Ainz started maneuvering the sensory organ that looked like a floating

eyeball.

“Let’s take a look inside the house.”

Ainz chose an old broken house nearby and moved the sensory organ in. Even if the interior was dark, it would show up as bright as day once the organ got in.

In that room, a white Lizardman was being pressed down with its tail lifted up. A black Lizardman was riding on top.

Baffling.

Ainz didn’t understand what was going on in the very beginning. The next instant, that changed to confusion as to why they are doing that thing at a time like this.

Ainz then moved the sensory organ outside silently.

“……”

“……”

Feeling troubled, Ainz placed his palm on his face. The Guardians by his side didn’t know what to say and looked at each other.

Demiurge: “—What an unpleasant bunch. Cocytus will be attacking soon and they still have the nerve to do this?!”

Aura: “That’s right, that’s right!”

Mare: “Ah, well, ermm…”

Shalltear: “Demiurge is right. Let’s teach them a lesson!”

Albedo: “How envious…”

Ainz lifted a hand to stop the chatter of the Guardians.

“…Forget it, they will be dead soon. I saw in a movie once that desperate situations like these would stimulate their instinct to reproduce.”

Ainz nodded to affirm his own opinion.

Demiurge: “You are right!”

Aura: “If it’s only this much, we can let them off~”

Shalltear: “Right, right!”

Mare: “Ermm, ah, that…”

Albedo: “Me too, with Ainz-sama...”

Ainz: “...All of you be quiet.”

After all the Guardians shut their mouths, Ainz sighed.

“...I think I lost my drive, but never mind. There shouldn’t be anyone we need to look out for in the village. But we can’t lower our guard, someone might be heading our way. Aura...”

Ainz suddenly stopped moving and stared at the two children.

‘Oh no! I messed up! They are not old enough for sex ed yet... No, it’s way too soon for that!’

Ainz felt he could empathize with how a father felt when an intense

sex scene comes up while watching TV with the whole family.

‘What are parents supposed to answer when their children ask them ‘where do babies come from’? Shit! I did let Simmering Teapot’s kids see that kind of scene—Eh, it should be fine. Ignoring Albedo, Demiurge…will probably explain it from a medical angle… That will be the back up plan. Shalltear…she seemed to be fine. Anyway, I will remember this as an issue to be resolved later.’

After pushing the problem to the back of his mind, Ainz coughed and said:

“If the security net reveals anything, all the Guardians and I will move

out together."

If a player from YGGDRASIL did exist, Ainz didn't plan to honor the agreement he made to let the Lizardmen village go. If the other party wouldn't join them, they would be destroyed by Nazarick's full might to prevent intel from leaking. If that was the case, Ainz would destroy the village even if he had to throw in all the forces from the 8th Floor.

Ainz shook off the guilt of betraying the promise he made with Cocytus. If it was for the sake of something of the utmost importance, a white lie could smooth things over.

"...Alright then, now we wait for the show to start...and admire

Cocytus's combat prowess."

Part 2

Four hours passed in a flash.

The Lizardmen warriors were already gathering in the front gate of the village—in the wetlands where the ice was melting. After the intense battle several days ago, there weren't many Lizardmen warriors left.

They numbered 316.

Lizardmen that were not warriors would not be taking part because Shasuryu said 'The enemy is few, having too many people will only get in the way'.

It seemed reasonable at first, but it didn't hold water.

Zaryusu stood far from the Lizardmen, watching the gathering Lizardmen warriors.

Everyone had war paint representing their ancestors on them, their faces showed wills as tough as steel. They seemed to think they wouldn't lose.

The Lizardmen around them cheered the warriors on. In that group, expressions of unease could be seen clearly.

To keep the anxiety in his heart from showing, Zaryusu worked hard to show a poker face in front of the other Lizardmen, keeping

them away from the truth of this fight being a sacrificial offering to the Overlord of Death.

This was a battle where the Overlord of Death was going to display his might to the Lizardmen, to completely crush the Lizardmen's will to resist. They had no chance of winning from the very start. Shasuryu's words from earlier actually entailed the wish to keep the sacrifices to the minimum.

Zaryusu averted his eyes from the Lizardmen and glared at the enemy territory with sharp eyes.

The skeleton army was rooted in the same spot, not moving an inch. The figure of a monster by the name of Cocytus could not be seen

around them. ‘It couldn’t be a skeleton, he is someone the Overlord of Death trusted, there is no way he is a minion-level monster. He must be someone whose will is so obviously strong that you can even feel it to the tip of your tail with just one look.’

The sound of a large creature moving in the wetlands could be heard from behind the anxious Zaryusu—

“—Hey, Zaryusu.”

—Zenberu greeted nonchalantly as usual. Even though they were heading towards death, Zenberu was his usual self.

“Our morale seems to be at its

peak."

"Yes it is, it will be great if it keeps at this level in the face of the powerful enemy, Cocytus..."

"Yeah. Oh? It's time?"

Shasuryu appeared at the main gate, and all eyes fell on him and the two wetland fairies beside him.

Crusch was absent because she exhausted all her mana to summon the wetland fairies. After having cast several long duration defensive buffs and summoning the fairies, the intense mana toll made her immobile. When the two of them left the room, Crusch already told Zaryusu she would lose consciousness from overusing

mana, and that this would be the last time they would see each other.

Zaryusu who didn't have his mate besides him cast a lonesome gaze in Crusch's direction. Her face when she bid farewell broke Zaryusu's heart.

"Warriors, advance!"

Shasuryu's uplifting command raised the morale of the Lizardmen to new heights.

He had to change his mindset to that of a warrior. Zaryusu gathered his thoughts.

Under the lead of Shasuryu and the two wetland fairies, the Lizardmen marched forth slowly.

They moved away from the village to avoid collateral damage to it.

Zaryusu and Zenberu were the rear guard.

Zaryusu looked back at the village suddenly. The tattered mud walls, the worried group of Lizardmen seeing them off, and—

Zaryusu sighed and shook his worries away and took large stride forward. He didn't utter the name of the female Lizardman that was right at his lips.

The Lizardmen traversed the wetlands, forming up between the enemy skeleton army and the village.

There was no particular formation,

the Lizardmen simply gathered randomly as they waited for the upcoming battle. The only clear arrangement was that the various tribal chiefs, Zaryusu and the two wetland fairies were standing in front.

The skeleton army was probably waiting for Zaryusu and the others to come. The skeletons banged on their shields and marched forward.

If the timing was even slightly off, it would just sound like random noise from a marching army, but their movements were in sync and the sound was as one. In a different setting, this performance would be worthy of applause and praise.

While the sound drew the attention

of the Lizardmen, to the rear of the skeletons—several trees in the forest fell.

There was only one reason why the thick, large trees fell. Someone cut them down.

This caused a commotion among the Lizardmen.

As they couldn't see how it was done, it might be possible that this was the handiwork of several beings. However, the timing between the felling of each tree was too tidy. After seeing the synchronized movement of the skeletons, it might be possible for several beings working together to achieve that, but not a single Lizardmen thought this was the

case here.

A strange premonition lingered in their hearts, the feeling that this was the work of just one being.

This was because there was no sound of blades cutting into the trees before they fell. Which meant that it might be improbable, but it was done by a very strong being in one stroke.

What kind of strength and weapon could cut a large tree in one strike?

The thuds of falling trees together with the banging of shields came closer to the Lizardmen.

Anxious feelings welled up. This was expected, how could anyone keep calm in such a situation. Even

Zenberu who had the resolve to die, or Zaryusu and Shasuryu were shaken even though they hid it well.

Moments later, the one opening a path in the forest revealed itself. At the same time, the banging of the shields stopped.

In the eerily silent space, a smooth blue circle appeared before them. If not for the thick clouds, there was no telling how bright his reflection would be.

That large body of 250 cm in height looked like an insect standing on two legs. The appearance was like that of an ant or mantis, a hybrid born of a twisted devil.

Its hard exoskeleton had a frosty air

about it, sparkling like diamond dust.

It had a spiked tail that was twice its height and powerful jaws that looked powerful enough to chew off a human arm in one bite.

He had four clawed arms with shiny gauntlets gracing each one. A round golden necklace was worn around its neck and silver bangles adorned its legs.

The powerful being on par with the Overlord of Death—made its appearance.

'So this is Cocytus?'

Zaryusu's heart raced and his breathing became ragged.

None of the Lizardmen spoke. Their eyes were drawn to the monster that showed itself, unable to shift their gaze away. Even though they were afraid, they were too scared to look away.

The group backed away unconsciously. Be it the Lizardmen who came with rousing fighting spirits or Zaryusu and the others who came here with the resolve to die, all of them were stunned in the face of dominating power.

‘I know the Overlord of Death is holding back, but to think a powerful being that wants to fight could be so terrifying.’

Even with magic that could suppress fear, the urge to run away

still sprung up from within Zaryusu. It was a miracle that the other Lizardmen who weren't protected by such spells did not run away.

Cocytus drew near slowly.

He walked into the wetlands, passing the skeletons with swagger —

Cocytus stopped about 30 meters before the Lizardmen, on top of a small knoll. Cocytus then moved his insect-like face on his long neck. He seemed to be searching for someone.

Zaryusu felt Cocytus's gaze rested on him for a brief moment.

"—Alright, Ainz-sama is watching,

so show your might. Before that,
「Ice Pillar」.”

With the activation of the spell, two pillars of ice sprouted between the Lizardmen and Cocytus, about 20 meters away.

“This might be rude for the warriors who came with the resolve to die, but know this, only death awaits all who cross beyond these ice pillars.”

Cocytus crossed two of his arms, his body language seemed like a signal of him leaving the decision up to the Lizardmen.

“Hey hey, he is an unexpectedly a nice guy...”

Zaryusu nodded in agreement when he heard Zenberu’s comment.

He then took a step forth. Zenberu, Shasuryu and the two other tribal chiefs followed.

Shasuryu turned back and told the warriors following them:

“You lot stay here...no, go back to the village. If not...you will die because of us.”

“What?! We want to fight too! It is scary...but even so, we want to fight!”

“There is no cowardice in retreat, living on takes more courage.”

“But—”

“Not all the Lizardmen can go back, that’s how it is. As the tribal leaders, we can’t allow others to

conquer us without a fight, right?"

"But Chief, we also want to fight."

"Hold it young ones! Scram, get out of here, leave the rest to us old timers!"

The Lizardmen pushing their way to the front were old, but not elderly enough to be called old men. They numbered 57, and the other Lizardmen couldn't say anything after seeing their faces.

If they showed resolved or resignation, the others would had insisted in going with them. But their expressions were pleading them, begging the younger ones to live on.

The speechless warriors reluctantly

fell back.

Shasuryu turned to Cocytus once again.

“...Apologies for the wait, Cocytus.”

Cocytus extended one of his arms, bending a thin finger, gesturing at them to come at him. Facing the taunt of the enemy, Shasuryu yelled at the top of his voice:

“Charge—!”

“Warrghhhh!”

The Lizardmen who steeled themselves mentally roared from the bottom of their hearts and rushed at Cocytus.

Cocytus looked coldly at the

warriors charging him.

“...I am sorry to do this to you, warriors, but let me cut down your numbers.”

Cocytus wouldn’t lose even if all the warriors reached him, but he still needed to pick his opponents.

Personally, Cocytus wanted to show his respect as a warrior and fight in a distance where the enemy could strike at him. But he owed a deep debt to his master, so it would be rude to show Ainz a disgraceful fight between a Nazarick Guardian and unruly mobs.

Cocytus released his sealed spirit.

The ability of the class ‘Knight of Niflheim’— 「Frost Aura」. This

special ability used extreme cold to deal damage and slightly lowered the speed of adversaries. At full power, it would even affect the Lizardmen watching from the sidelines. Cocytus didn't wish for that.

Suppressing his power.

Limiting the range, lowering the damage.

"About this much..."

With Cocytus as the center, the extreme cold covered a radius of 25 meters.

Affected by the extreme cold, the temperature dropped drastically, making the air shriek.

“...Hmmm, that should do.”

Cocytus sealed his spirit.

It happened in a flash, the incredible cold was already gone as if it was an illusion. But that was definitely not a dream or an illusion. The bodies of the 57 Lizardmen on the wetlands was the best proof.

Only five Lizardmen could still move, and they were the five strongest people among the Lizardmen. They weren’t intimidated by their comrades’ deaths or Cocytus’s ability, moving as one.

A rock flew through the air. A Lizardman in full body armor led

the charge with two Lizardmen following behind. The wetland fairies moved slowly behind the two Lizardmen with their bodies that had cracked in the cold. The last Lizardman at the back kept chanting spells.

The first strike was the rock aimed at Cocytus's throat. However, that attack was meaningless because—

"—The equipment on all Guardians can defend against projectiles."

—An invisible barrier seemed to deflect the rock.

The leading Lizardman followed next, wearing one of the four treasures passed down from generation to generation—White

Dragon Bone. It was tough enough to block Frost Pain which was also one of the four treasures, the hardest armor known to Lizardmen.

Cocytus who was facing him drew a sword out of thin air—as if the blade was already there.

The taichi Cocytus drew—with the length exceeding 180 cm, was known as Royal Blade God Slayer. It was the sharpest among the 21 weapons Cocytus possessed.

He then slashed at the Lizardman before him.

The blade that sliced through the air made the air howl—a calm sound. In a different situation, one might want to listen carefully to

this clean sound.

After that sound, the body of the tribal chief split in half together with the armor, falling to the left and right into the wetlands.

The Royal Blade God Slayer was not damaged after cleaving the hardest armor of the Lizardmen.

The two Lizardmen behind weren't fazed by the gruesome death of their comrade, attacking from either side with their weapons raised.

"Shyaa!"

On the right side was Zenberu's chop, powered by 「Iron Natural Weapon」 and 「Iron Skin」. It was directed at full power toward

Cocytus's face.

"Warrgghh!"

On the left side was Frost Pain, aimed at his abdomen.

This melee attack took advantage of the logic of long weapons being hard to use in close quarters.

And of course, that only applied to normal people.

Cocytus slightly turned and used his blade to block Zenberu's arm from the right. His movement was smooth and elegant, as if the weapon in his hand was a part of his body.

With the ability of 「Iron Skin」, Zenberu was on par with steel in

term of hardness. But the clash with the armor earlier showed how sharp Royal Blade God Slayer was.

The blade slid into his arm smoothly as if it was slicing through water.

“Ugghhhh!”

As blood spurted from Zenberu’s right stump, Cocytus’s other hand was already pinching Frost Pain that was aimed at his abdomen.

“—Oh, I see. This is a nice sword...”

“Tch!”

Zaryusu gave up on the Frost Pain that couldn’t be moved and kicked Cocytus in the knee cap. Cocytus did not dodge and took the blow. In

the end, it was Zaryusu who landed the blow that suffered intense pain.

It was the same sensation of kicking an iron wall with all your might.

“「Over Magic: Mass Lesser Heal」13!”

After exhausting a large amount of mana, it enabled the use of higher tier magic that was not usually accessible—Shasuryu cast a mass healing spell boosted by magical enhancement.

“Fumu...”

Cocytus seemed intrigued as he stared at Shasuryu who used a spell modifier he did not know, but the two wetland fairies blocked his

view. The wetland fairies moved in front of Zenberu, whose arm was regenerating from magic, and attacked Cocytus with their tentacles. Before their attacks even landed, Cocytus slashed at them impatiently.

As the wetland fairies crumbled into dust, Zaryusu's fist landed on Cocytus's solar plexus, abdomen and chest. And of course, the one injured was Zaryusu. The skin on his fist was torn and bleeding.

"Annoying."

Cocytus swung his spiked tail hard at Zaryusu's chest.

"Guuahhh!"

Zaryusu flew like a ball hit by a bat

with a cracking sound, flying high and far before rolling onto the wetlands. He finally stopped after rolling on the wetlands, but the pain in his chest and the blood spilling from his throat made it hard to breathe.

The broken bones probably pierced his lungs, he couldn't breathe in even if he wanted to, feeling like he was underwater. The warm liquid spilling from his throat made him want to throw up. Zaryusu looked at his chest and saw blood bleeding from his wounds that was gored by sharp spikes.

—Just one hit turned Zaryusu to this pitiful state.

Zaryusu tried to breath, and with all

his might glared with spirited eyes at Cocytus who might move in for the finishing blow.

“Since you still have the will to fight, I will return this to you.”

Cocytus tossed Frost Pain to Zaryusu’s side and ignored him, turning to face the remaining Lizardmen.

Shasuryu cast healing magic on Zenberu who had regenerated his arm but lost a lot of stamina.

Right before Cocytus reached them, another rock came flying at him to divert his attention—But it was in vain as it was deflected easily.

“—Irritating.”

Cocytus mumbled and extended his arm at the Small Fang chief.

“「Piercing Icicle」.”

Dozens of icicles as thick as a human arm rained down in a wide-area attack.

The Lizardman who was within range was pierced by the icicles instantly.

One hit his chest, two hit his abdomen, one in his right thigh, all the icicles penetrated the Lizardman’s body easily.

The chief of the Small Fang—the Lizardman with the best guerilla abilities fell dead onto the wetlands like a puppet without strings.

“Waarrghhh!”

“「Over Magic: Mass Lesser Heal」!”

Zenberu rushed forth as Shasuryu once again cast healing magic. Zenberu was buying time for Zaryusu to recover.

He knew that this was rash and how insignificant he was before the might of Cocytus. Even so, Zenberu did not hesitate charging ahead.

When Zenberu got within range, Cocytus slashed with the Royal Blade God Slayer casually.

That slash was faster than Zenberu’s dynamic vision—

The speed was way faster than

Zenberu's agility—

The sword easily cut Zenberu's body—

Blood gushed from the body of the decapitated Zenberu and he collapsed onto the wetlands. Moments later, the head fell onto the ground.

"...Well then, two left... I heard about your strength from Ainz-sama, so you two really are the ones to make it to the very end."

Cocytus, who had not moved a single step since the battle, looked at the remaining duo and swung his blade. White smog seemed to come out from the blade and the blood and gore on it were gone without a

trace. The movement was so graceful it seemed capable of ridding the world of everything.

Zaryusu who had recovered enough to stand up and Shasuryu who drew the large sword on his back. The two of them faced Cocytus with a pincer formation. Zaryusu took some blood that was bleeding from his wound and painted it on his face.

It looked like war paint that was used to summon the ancestors to descend upon them.

“—Younger Brother, how’re your wounds?”

“Not good, my injuries are thumping dully. I can still swing my

sword a few times though."

"Is that so... That should do right? Actually, my mana is exhausted, I will collapse if I am not careful."

Shasuryu grinded his teeth, he was probably laughing. Zaryusu's expression changed when he heard that.

"...Is that so. You are pushing yourself too, Elder Brother."

Zaryusu exhaled gently with a smile and relaxed his shoulder. His sword-bearing arm drooped down.

An intense pain hit him in the chest, but Zaryusu tried his best to ignore it.

'Don't ever give up hope until the

very last moment'—Zaryusu's will keep wielding his sword.

From the very beginning, he knew there was no chance of winning.

Defeat was inevitable, but he couldn't just give up.

Giving up would mean conning countless Lizardmen of their lives, lying to them that they would be victorious. Since there were Lizardmen who believed this liar, he would not accept defeat.

Giving his all until the very last moment—

"I can still swing my sword!"

Zaryusu's roar echoed out loud.

The sound of Cocytus's teeth protruding out of his mouth clanking shut could be heard.

"A nice roar—"

Cocytus was probably laughing. That wasn't the sound of the powerful looking down on the weak, but that of a warrior acknowledging his equal.

"Very well, Younger Brother. Let's fight till the very end."

Shasuryu laughed too.

"Okay... My apologies for keeping you waiting, Cocytus-san."

Cocytus merely shrugged in response to Shasuryu's words.

“Don’t worry. Interrupting the last farewells of two brothers would be very rude. Prepare to die… Ah, it looks like you already are, aren’t you?”

In the face of Zaryusu and Shasuryu who took a step forth, Cocytus swung his blade and said:

“State your names.”

“Shasuryu Shasha.”

“Zaryusu Shasha.”

“…I will remember them, remember you two warriors. I also have to apologize, I would normally fight with a weapon in each hand… I am not demeaning you, but you are not strong enough for me to do so.”

“Such a pity.”

“Absolutely right—Let’s go!”

The two sprinted at Cocytus, splashing the waters in the wetlands.

The slight difference in the duo’s timing made Cocytus puzzled.

They wouldn’t enter his attack range at the same time, Shasuryu was faster. Suspecting the enemy had a scheme in mind, Cocytus waited eagerly for their attack.

The first to get into range was Shasuryu and Cocytus kept a close eye on him, wondering what he would do.

Shasuryu stopped right outside the

attack range of Cocytus's sword—

"「Earth Bind」!"

—He casted a spell.

Numerous chains made from mud flew at Cocytus and Zaryusu used this chance to charge. To make it harder for his enemy to gauge his attack range, Zaryusu hid Frost Pain behind his back.

Shasuryu announcing that he had exhausted his mana had been just a trick to deceive Cocytus. If he fell for it, Cocytus might get constrained by the magical chains and be hit by Zaryusu who was attacking from behind.

No matter how hard Cocytus's exoskeleton was, Zaryusu should be

able to break through by throwing everything he had behind a stabbing attack. Zaryusu who abandoned all defenses in favor of offense would definitely yield a powerful attack.

'He seems very confident with his sword.'

Cocytus emphatized with him. Just like him, Cocytus bore intense feelings for his weapons, especially the blade in his hand right now—He felt very strongly for this weapon that was used by his creator in the past. That was why Cocytus was using Royal Blade God Slayer despite the disparity in fighting prowess as a show of his greatest respect.

However, they misjudged one thing. Their opponent right now was the Guardian of Nazarick's 5th Floor.

"...The spell cast by those with a level lower than mine won't break through my defense."

The mud chain bounced off before it could physically touch Cocytus, falling back into the wetlands like slabs of mud. Low-tier magic couldn't penetrate Cocytus's magic defense.

"— 「Icy Burst」!"

With a roar that came from behind his back, Cocytus was covered by a white fog around him.

Futile effort.

Cocytus, who was completely immune to frost attacks, simply embraced the gentle freezing breeze as he waited for Zaryusu and Shasuryu to get into range.

One breath later, the moment he was waiting for came. But Cocytus hesitated slightly, wondering if cutting off their heads was enough to stop them.

When facing Zaryusu who had abandoned his defense, decapitating him might not halt his attack. The image of a headless body charging at him appeared in Cocytus's mind. If that was the case, he would take out the arms, then the head.

'No, that is not a clean enough kill, I

will finish him in one strike.'

Zaryusu's reckless charge was too slow for Cocytus.

The vaguely visible black figure—
The sword swung out by Zaryusu, was pinched by Cocytus's fingers like he did earlier.

Cocytus did not feel any frost from his fingers, Zaryusu probably knew it was useless against Cocytus and didn't activate this ability.

The unexpectedly quick assault was blocked so easily by Cocytus, which made Cocytus doubtful. But the doubts only lingered for an instant, he could finish off his foe with a swing of his blade, there was no need to think further.

And then, there is only one more left.

‘So it was just a reckless assault...’

Cocytus who felt disappointed was about to swing his sword when he changed his mind.

‘I see.’

“Warrghhh!”

With a roar a giant sword cleaved through the icy smog. Shasuryu slashed through the fog strongly enough to disperse it.

Be it the 「Earth Bind」, Zaryusu’s attack or 「Icy Burst」, all these were just feints.

Cocytus needed to be wary of the

stabbing attack from Frost Pain, but the threat of Shasuryu's cleaving sword was greater. This must be the true intention of the enemy, but—

"If you want to perform a sneak attack—you have to do it silently."

If they couldn't cover their footsteps while running in water, it was not really a sneak attack. Cocytus was puzzled, was all of this worth the damage they took from the 「Icy Burst」? Or were they just struggling in vain?

But it was a fact that an enemy was in his attack range.

Zaryusu's only weapon was immobile, rendering him helpless. This was just changing the order in

which Cocytus would kill them. After coming to this conclusion, Cocytus wielded the blade in his hand.

One slash.

Shasuryu's sword broke in two. Before Shasuryu's body even hit the ground, Cocytus withdrew his blade, planning to follow through the attack into Zaryusu—

At this moment, Cocytus's fingers pinching Zaryusu's sword slipped.

The surprised Cocytus checked his fingers, wondering why the sword that he pinched was sliding forth.

In the misty fog, Cocytus could see that his fingers and the sword were covered in a red liquid.

In an instant, Cocytus understood why his fingers slipped.

‘—Blood?’

Confusion.

Cocytus tried to think back where Zaryusu’s sword could have been stained, and understood after seeing Zaryusu’s face through the fog.

The blood Zaryusu smeared on his face wasn’t war paint. It was used to smear his sword.

「Icy Burst」 wasn’t meant to damage Cocytus or hide Shasuryu’s whereabouts, it was to hide the blood on the sword. That was the reason he had hidden the sword behind his back too.

When Cocytus stopped Zaryusu's attack the first time, he used his fingers to pinch it. Zaryusu remembered that and bet on the slim chance it would happen again, setting up this scenario with all his wits. A surge of electricity seemed to jump through Cocytus's brain.

'It was back then! No wonder the attack felt so weak! That was the reason! The scheme of using blood to slip through won't work every time. So he was misleading me, making me feel it was easy to pinch it, so he held back!'

The sword slid in slowly, closing in on Cocytus's pale blue body. Even Cocytus couldn't stop the sword with Zaryusu's body weight and might behind it with just two wet

fingers.

If the place he pinched it was slightly further away, Cocytus might have been able to do something, but at this distance, there was nothing he could do.

Cocytus was so moved that he shivered.

It needed a bit of luck, but it was a bet that needed every single round to be won. Most importantly—this was not possible without Shasuryu.

Shasuryu probably didn't know what Zaryusu's plan was, but the older brother trusted his younger brother completely and sacrificed himself. The meaningless sneak attack and roar was all in the hope

of diverting an instant of attention away from his younger brother.

And it was really just an instant.

In that brief moment in time—as Zaryusu was squeezing Frost Pain forth with all his might—the lower jaw of Cocytus moved.

“Amazing—”

The sword slashing at Cocytus—was deflected easily. The body with a faint blue glow did not even have a scratch on it.

This was the result of the difference in power between the highest level NPC in Nazarick and the Lizardmen.

“—Sorry to say, I possess the special

ability to temporarily nullify the attack of low tier-weapons. If I activate this ability, your attacks will be meaningless."

It was a splendid strike, even Cocytus felt it was worthy of leaving a mark on his body as a sign of respect to this warrior. However, he couldn't do this as a Guardian fighting before the Supreme Ruler.

Cocytus intentionally took half a step back, splashing the mud which soiled his beautiful blue body.

It was just a tiny step back.

A step back didn't mean anything, even moving back wouldn't affect anything. Zaryusu was doomed and Cocytus would definitely prevail.

But this step back was the show of praise from the overwhelmingly strong Cocytus toward the weak Zaryusu.

Zaryusu resigned to his fate, had a clear smile only those who had done their best could show. Cocytus slashed the Royal Blade God Slayer toward him—

Part 3

“A splendid battle.”

Ainz praised Cocytus who knelt before him.

“Thank you.”

“That might be so, but I believe you understand clearly that we are

showing them the stick now, but you need to show them the carrot from now on. Do not start a reign of terror."

"I understand."

Ainz nodded and looked at the other Guardians in the room.

"Very well. Guardians, listen well. I already said in the Throne Room that the Lizardmen village will be ruled by Cocytus. If there is anything Cocytus needs, do lend him your support. Cocytus, I hope you can engrave loyalty towards Nazarick deep into the hearts of the Lizardmen... And to provide them with an elite education... I leave all these to you... Let me know if you need special items like 《Heaven's

Feather》. I will also loan some 《Power Suits》 to you in the meantime."

In the game YGGDRASIL, it was possible to change races midway, but it didn't mean you could switch as you wish. You needed to fulfil several conditions and the change would be irreversible.

One of the conditions was a specific item. For example, you would need the 《Book of the Dead》 to be a Lich. To turn into an imp required the 《Fallen Seeds》. And the 《Heaven's Feather》 that Ainz mentioned was a required item to become an angel.

Changing one's race might be possible in this world, that was why

Ainz couldn't help sharing his ideas.

"I will seek your advice when the time comes, Ainz-sama. May I ask how you plan to deal with those Lizardmen?"

"Which Lizardman?"

"Yes, the two Lizardmen named Zaryusu and Shasuryu."

'The two who fought till the very end. Their corpses should still be in the wetlands. But what of it?'

"I see. Collect their corpses, I will use their bodies as material when I create undead with my special ability."

"—That would be a pity."

“Hmmm, what do you mean? Do they have such value?”

When Ainz watched the battle through the Mirror of Remote Viewing, he saw that Cocytus was absolutely dominating, there wasn’t anything else of note.

“...They were weak, but I could see their warrior spirit and fearless resolve in the face of the strong. It is a pity to use them as materials. I think they could become even stronger, maybe unbelievably so. Ainz-sama shouldn’t have done experiments related to resurrecting the dead yet, how about testing it out on them?”

‘...Does he like those Lizardmen?’

To be frank, Ainz didn't know what to feel when he heard the term warrior spirit. He came across the term killing intent in novels and mangas, but didn't think much of it. It was just like the time when Ainz had warned Narberal about these things, and she had said 'Ah, yes, I see, oh~', that kind of feeling. Similarly, the resonance among warriors was something Ainz didn't understand.

This was because Ainz might look like this now, but he was originally just a normal salaryman. If a normal citizen born in Japan understood the warrior spirit, that would be dangerous. If it was the spirit of an excellent salaryman, he might comprehend a little.

“I see...it is a waste indeed.”

But what Ainz was actually thinking bafflingly was: ‘Even if you say it is a pity, I don’t understand.’

But thinking it through calmly, Cocytus had a point.

He was thinking about performing resurrection experiments somewhere, and Ainz felt using them to experiment had many benefits. And compared to the blattering Cocytus in the Throne Room, he now could provide clear and concise proposals. If this was a sign of improvement, Cocytus had passed with flying colors.

After thinking about it shortly, Ainz remembered he had excellent

subordinates.

He recalled the subordinates standing around him silently in a manner befitting a servant.

“Albedo, tell me your opinions.”

“My thoughts are the same as Ainz-sama.”

“...Demiurge, what do you think?”

“I think Ainz-sama is the most correct.”

“.....Shalltear, and you?”

“I think the same as Demiurge and await Ainz-sama’s judgement.”

“.....Aura.”

“Yes, I think the same way as everyone too.”

“.....Mare.”

“Erm, erm erm, yes, I think the same too.”

Their answers were as good as not answering at all, giving Ainz a headache.

After thinking it through, Ainz came to a conclusion—Maybe from the standpoint of a Guardian, they didn’t think there was any major issue. Which also meant there wouldn’t be major impact no matter what decision he made.

That was also dependent on the circumstances of the Guardians. There might be problems if their

situation changed.

Simply put, when a small group of people said a hundred million was a small amount of money, there would be the problem of how trustworthy that statement was. This was the difference in the perception of values.

‘A waste of breath…well, I could think of it as being fine in resurrecting them right? I was planning to deliberate over it more, I have made too many mistakes recently.’

With no other choice, Ainz had to weigh the pros and cons from his own standpoint.

“…We have decided to rule over the

Lizardmen, but do they have a suitable representative? Or a group that could represent them?"

"No, but they do have a suitable representative."

"Oh? Who is it?"

"The white Lizardman that didn't take part in the battle earlier. She seemed to possess the power of druids."

"Oh, that one! Hmm, that could work..."

If it was her, she could be of use— Ainz thought. He could use her to spy on things.

However, implementing the idea Ainz had in mind might make

Cocytus who would be ruling the Lizardmen feel troubled. So what should he do? Ainz suddenly had a moment of brilliance.

'...Wouldn't it be faster to just ask? Although I didn't get any useful answers just now...'

Ainz shared his plans with Cocytus, and Cocytus expressed his acknowledgement.

It was hard to judge whether Cocytus said that to accommodate his master, but Demiurge and Albedo didn't have strange reactions either when he glanced at them. This made Ainz relaxed and assured him that it shouldn't be a problem.

“Very good. How long will you need to bring her here?”

“Pardon my impudence, I thought Ainz-sama would ask for her, so I ordered her to wait in a room nearby.”

Ainz couldn’t help looking at Demiurge and saw him shaking his head.

‘Awesome, he handled it well, without any instructions and it didn’t seem to be someone else’s idea.’

‘This must be how a superior feels when he sees his subordinate mature as he had hoped for,’ Ainz thought with a face of satisfaction. But his head was a skull so it didn’t

really moved.

“No no, well done Cocytus. Wasting time is foolish, your judgement is on point. Alright then, bring her over.”

“Erm, please wait!”

“What is it, Aura?”

“I don’t think a shabby place like this is good enough. Even though we are hosting people who are submitting to us, it is too run-down for Ainz-sama’s status. I feel that the meeting should be done in the Throne Room of Nazarick.”

All the other Guardians except Mare nodded gently in agreement.

“...My apologies. I miss out on this

point, please forgive me!”

“Ahhh...”

Ainz never thought about that. He then thought about how to react. Suddenly, he remembered something. In that case—

“—Aura.”

“Yes!”

“I told you that this place you built—the place filled with your feelings and emotions, is as good as Nazarick right? I really mean it. Cocytus, bring her in. I will hold the audience here.”

“Ai-Ainz-sama!”

“Aura, back down.”

“Albedo!”

Aura protested with her face red, saying “Why are you stopping me?” However, Albedo merely glance at Aura before ignoring her fixing her sight at the door. The one answering the emotional Aura was Demiurge.

“...Anything Ainz-sama says is the law. Since Ainz-sama said this place is as good as Nazarick—”

“—It must be true.”

Shalltear continued.

‘I don’t think my words are ironclad laws. Although I don’t want to be thought of like that...but just this one time, it is a big help.’

“Aura, I will say this again. As my most trusted subordinates—one of the Guardians—this place you put in so much effort to build is on the same level as Nazarick. It is true even now when construction is ongoing... Do you understand?”

“...Ainz-sama, thank you very much.”

Aura deeply lowered her head and the other Guardians did the same.

‘There is no need...to be so emotional... This is embarrassing.’

“Well then, usher her in, Cocytus.”

“Yes!”

In a short moment, Cocytus brought a pure white Lizardman

into the room.

The Lizardman knelt before Ainz and lowered her face to the ground.

“State your name.”

“Yes, Supreme Overlord of Death—Ainz Ooal Gown. I am the representative of the Lizardmen, Crusch Lulu.”

‘What an incredible title.’ He was curious as to who came up with this title, but Ainz acted like a calm king and said.

“...Hmmm, well met.”

“Yes. Gown-sama, please accept the oath of fealty from us, the Lizardmen.”

“Hmmm...”

Ainz watched Crusch closely.

The scales were pretty. They shone brightly under the illumination of the magical light. ‘I wonder how they would feel like if I were to touch them,’ Ainz was academically curious.

As he stared closely, he realized Crusch’s shoulders were trembling. Cocytus should have deactivated his 「Freezing Aura」 ability, so it must be due to some other reason.

Ainz pondered shortly and found the answer, it was obvious.

If she made Ainz unhappy, all the Lizardmen would be massacred. That was why she was so careful in

her speech. For Crusch who was under such crushing pressure, Ainz's unnatural silence planted a seed of terror.

Ainz didn't have the hobby of taking pleasure in bullying the weak. If it was for the good of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, he was willing to do anything no matter how cruel it was, but he wouldn't perform such destructive actions needlessly.

"The Lizardmen will be under my rule. However, Cocytus will be the one ruling in my place. Any objections?"

"—None."

"That is all. You may leave."

“Eh? Is that all?”

Crusch said in a surprised voice while she remained bowing. Like a person who was entrusted with an unreasonable request who might go insane at any moment.

“For now. Crusch Lulu. Your Lizardmen will be ushering in an era of prosperity now. Future generations of Lizardmen will be thankful for being my subjects.”

“We dare not, we are already thankful to the Supreme Ruler for granting us mercy even after we resisted with violence.”

Ainz got up from the throne slowly. He walked to Crusch’s side, squatted down and place his hand

on Crusch's shoulder.

Ainz could feel a tremor coming from Crusch's body.

"I have a special task for you."

"As Gown-sama's faithful servant, I will do anything I can..."

"Not as a servant, I want you to do something for me—in exchange for Zaryusu's resurrection."

After speaking the name he heard from Cocytus, Crusch lifted her head immediately, her face twisted from shock.

Gleeful from this 'jackpot', Ainz continued observing Crusch. She was probably trying to hide it, but her expression was wavering. It was

hard to judge as her emotions as her facial expression was very different from humans, but it should shed some clue.

“Something like that...”

“I am the one who controls life and death. To me, death is but a state of being.”

When he heard Crusch’s voice that was tapering off, Ainz answered.

“It is the same for poison and sickness, but I can’t extend the lifespan of mortals.”

It might be impossible through normal means, but with the Super-tier magic 「Wish Upon a Star」, it probably could be done... Although it might be possible, it was better

not to sound it out loud.

"...What do you wish of me, your humble slave...? My body?"

Ainz was speechless.

"No, that's a bit..."

A reptile was a bit too much. Ainz wanted to back away immediately, but he pushed himself to play his role. As for the sound of teeth grinding that came from somewhere, he would just ignore it for now.

"Cough cough! No. It's simple, I want you to keep a close watch on whether there are 'Lizardmen thinking of rebelling'."

"There are no such Lizardmen."

Ainz laughed at Crusch's confident reply.

"I am not dumb enough to assume that. I am not familiar with how Lizardmen think, but using the race of humans as an example, betrayal is common. That is why I want an agent on the inside to watch over things."

Crusch turned expressionless again, making Ainz panic on the inside, wondering whether the deal was a failure. There was a backup plan not involving the resurrection of Zaryusu, but doing so had the goal of binding Crusch with gratitude. What should he do if she rejected him here?

'I shouldn't be too greedy and go for

broke... That must be what they mean by no use crying over spilled milk.'

"...Before you lies the chance for a miracle. But this chance won't be here forever. If you don't grab it immediately, it will be gone forever."

With a shiver, Crusch's expression moved like a cramp.

"I am not going to use irritating rituals. Resurrection spells exist in this world right? That is what I am going to use."

"That is the legendary..."

Facing Crusch who swallowed her words back, Ainz adopted an arrogant attitude and gently said.

“Crusch. What is the most important thing for you? I want you to consider.”

As Ainz observed Crusch’s eyes starting to waver, he seemed to be seeing the illusion of scoring a client in a business meeting.

Next, Ainz had to let Crusch understand this miracle was not a free service. Providing free service would make others suspicious, but they would be more receptive of it with a request for an adequate amount of money.

“I just need you to watch your fellow Lizardmen in the dark. Depending on the circumstances, you might need to make hard choices. To prevent a betrayal, I will

cast a special magic on the resurrected Zaryusu. If I think you have betrayed me, I will end him immediately. It must be troubling for you, but the resurrection of Zaryusu is not something you can get in a fair deal, right?"

'Actually, there is no such magic.'

Ainz acted as if he had said everything and stood up slowly. He then opened his arms.

Ainz looked at the struggling Crusch.

"Oh, right, tell the resurrected Zaryusu this in my place. I revived him because he is of use to me. I promise not to mention your name. So, Crusch Lulu. Choose now. This

is the last chance for you to get your beloved Zaryusu back. What say you? Yes? Or no? Choose."

Ainz reached a hand out to Crusch slowly. At the same time, he said to the Guardians.

"Do not do anything even if she rejects—Alright, ready to answer now? Crusch Lulu?"

Epilogue

Zaryusu felt a gentle sensation covering his entire body. A hand which wanted to pull him out from the abyss, but Zaryusu brushed it aside. He felt something disgusting from the touch of that hand

After a period of time between an instant and eternity, he felt the hand stretch out towards him once again. Just as he was about to brush it aside for a second time, he hesitated. Listening closely, he could hear a voice coming from that side. As it turned out, this rude awakening was the voice of the female he so deeply loved.

Hesitation.

Hesitation.

Still hesitation.

In this world where it was uncertain if time existed at all, Zaryusu kept on hesitating. Eventually, he seized the hand despite being very reluctant to do so.

And he was then pulled into a world of clarity.

Fatigue permeated through his entire body.

As if his insides had turned into paste.

Then he felt abnormally tired. He had never felt this tired even after overexerting himself physically.

Zaryusu struggled to open his heavy eyelids.

Blinding light entered his eyes. Although Lizardmen eyes would automatically adjust to light intensity, it could not do so instantaneously. Zaryusu blinked his eyes—

“Zaryusu!”

Someone was hugging him tight.

“C-Crusch?”

There should be no way he would ever hear this again, this female’s voice.

Zaryusu finally adjusted his eyes, and saw the female that was hugging him.

That was indeed his beloved female, Crusch Lulu.

Why? What was going on?

A flood of questions and unease rushed toward Zaryusu. His last memory was—the moment his head had dropped into the wetlands. He had most definitely been killed by Cocytus.

Then why was he still alive? Unless —

"—Was Crusch killed too?"

"Eh?"

Zaryusu opened his mouth to ask, yet his mouth seemed numb, unable to move properly.

What gave him his answer was the look of very confused expression on Crusch's face. Seeing that expression, Zaryusu was a little relieved, knowing that Crusch was not dead. Then why was he still alive?

A hint was given to him by a voice to his side.

"Well. There is some confusion after resurrection. It seems his level also dropped...thus it can be determined that there is not much difference from YGGDRASIL."

Realizing who was speaking to him, Zaryusu looked with surprise at that direction.

The one who stood there was the

king of death; the magic caster who possessed incomprehensible power.

In his hand he held a glowing short stick of about 30 cm in length, it emitted a sacred aura that appeared out of place in the hand of the Overlord of Death. It was an extremely beautiful item which seemed to be made out of ivory, with the front end coated in gold and the handle inscribed with runes.

Although Zaryusu did not know, it was a resurrection wand, the item which revived Zaryusu. Only faith-based magic casters could use items imbued with faith-based magic. However, this magic item was an exception to this faith-based system and could be used.

Zaryusu slowly turned his gaze, and recognized this place as the Lizardman village.

As if they were intending to surround the entire place, all the Lizardmen were prostrating. Even more shocking was that they were motionless—that posture was one of worship toward an extremely powerful being.

“What is happening...”

After witnessing such power, prostrating was only natural. However, the surrounding Lizardmen were not just showing respect, but something more. Lizardmen did not have gods. Strictly speaking, their objects of faith were their ancestral spirits.

The feeling given off right now by the surrounding Lizardmen was like that of a reverence towards a god.

“Hm. Step down, Lizardmen. Without instructions, nobody is permitted to enter the village.”

Nobody objected to these words. More than that, it was accepted without a sound being made. The only sounds which were heard were of bodies getting up and the splashes by walking along the wetlands. Leaving them behind, the Lizardmen departed from the clearing.

Seeing as he was so powerful that he had such a degree of strength, their wills should have been completely defeated. The

Lizardmen culture of submitting to the strong played a part as well. This meant that everything was developing according to the other side's script.

"Aura, are all of them gone?"

"Yes, they are."

The one who replied was the Dark Elf girl. Although there was also the factor that she had been behind him, out of sight all along, the girl surprisingly gave off no presence, therefore Zaryusu had not detected her at all.

"I see. Then first, a few words for you, Zaryusu Shasha. Congratulations on your resurrection."

Resurrection.

Until he registered the meaning of this word, Zaryusu required a little time. Then after he understood it, he also felt a shudder throughout his body.

Resurrection—which meant that he was alive again.

He was speechless and could only gasp.

“What is it? Do Lizardmen have some particular aversion to resurrection? Or have you forgotten how to speak?”

“Glug, glug...cough...y-you can resurrect the dead...?”

“That is true. What, you thought

something of this degree couldn't be done?"

"Did you hold...a big ceremony?"

"Big ceremony? What is that? I have no problems doing it by myself easily."

Hearing this, Zaryusu was completely lost for words. According to legends, resurrection magic was a power only Lizardmen of the Dragon King lineage possessed.

And he did so all by himself.

Monster? No.

An incredibly powerful magic caster? No.

Zaryusu understood this completely.

Leading a mythical army, commanding demons.

Which meant, this—the existence in front of him was one who could rival the gods.

Zaryusu staggered up, and prostrated in front of Ainz. Crusch also frantically knelt down in the same fashion.

“Supreme One.”

Although as he looked downward he saw something that seemed a little troubled but Zaryusu decided that it was just an illusion.

“I pledge my life to you.”

“Very well. What do you wish for? I will grant it to you in the name of Ainz Ooal Gown.”

“Please grant prosperity to the Lizardmen.”

“That is only natural, of course, I will guarantee the prosperity of all those who come under my dominion.”

“My gratitude.”

“Good. Is your speech still not clear? Rest for a bit and you will get used to it. Rest for now. Afterward there are various things which will have to be dealt with. The first thing would be the defense of this village that is under my dominion...for the details, discuss it

with Cocytus.”

Ainz left after he finished saying this. However, before that, there was something which Zaryusu had to do, and had to do right now.

“Please wait. What about Zenberu and Elder Brother?”

“Their corpses should be around the area.”

Ainz, who was just about planning to leave with Aura, stopped and casually gestured with his jaw in to the outside of the village.

“Can you please revive them?”

“...Hmm... I don’t see any benefit in doing so.”

“Then why me? Zenberu and Elder Brother are very powerful. They will definitely be useful.”

Ainz scrutinized Zaryusu, then shrugged his shoulders.

“I will consider it...preserve the two corpses well. I will consider it later.”

After speaking, Ainz dusted his robe as he left. Aura could be heard saying as she walked by his side spoke “That Hydra is so cute ne~”, and her voice faded into the distance and eventually disappeared.

Zaryusu finally stopped collapsing and relaxed.

“I made it through alive...or rather, I was revived...”

He did not know what kind of rule would await them in the future. However, since the Lizardmen's usefulness left an impression, it shouldn't be too bad.

"Crusch, Elder Brother—"

"Never mind about that. Worry about it later. For now just rest well and clear your fatigue. It will be fine, I can carry you."

"Ah...thank you."

Zaryusu closed his eyes and laid down. Just like in those days where he had overworked his body, he was eager to rest, and fell asleep once his eyes were closed.

Once again Zaryusu felt the touch of gentle hands stroking his body

back and forth as his consciousness slipped back into the darkness.

Afterword

I don't think there are any readers who only started reading the afterwords in this volume. Therefore, I would like to say to everyone long time no see, I am Maruyama Kugane.

Just as I mentioned in the afterword of the previous volume, the entire volume was used to depict the lizardmen's story, a totally different novel. This type of story should be rare for light novels right? Maybe it's just me, but I think there are few stories about the main character attacking a peaceful village.

How did you find this work?

The reception would probably trend towards two different ends, however, such scenes of the strong trampling over the weak would probably surface several more times.

The protagonist of 《Overlord》 isn't the type who only deals with the danger right before them, but one who will take the initiative to accomplish his goals and garner benefits for himself. This means that he won't save the main heroine because he heard that she is in distress, but the carnivorous type that seeks out the main heroine in distress... That sounds a bit wrong though.

Hence, readers who play strategy games should know that in order

for Ainz to build up his forces, instead of challenging the strong, he is more likely to recruit the weak to strengthen his army.

That's why I am writing this work from the rarely seen angle of the invaders, instead of the more common angle of the invaded. That might be so, but their fight on the open field isn't really a battle of invasion.

Next, allow me to express my gratitude.

So-bin-sama the Crusch you drew was so cute it makes me excited. Chord Design Studio is responsible for the design work. Osako-sama who went to the finest detail for proofreading and editing. And F-

tan-sama the editor, who rendered help to me in all sorts of ways.

Thank you everybody.

There is also Honey, thank you for your retorts. It is a pain to tie up the loose ends.

And the readers who purchased this book, allow me to give my sincere thanks. I am really very grateful.

Well then, I hope to see you next time.

See you in the next volume.

Something off topic, I actually put in the word ‘death’ into one of the chapters for each volume, I am almost out of ideas now. Maybe this won’t show up in the next volume.

This is just me being playful, it won't cause any trouble... However, if I don't have the taste for coming up with names, it would be really difficult! Depressed.

2013 July Maruyama Kugane

Translator Notes

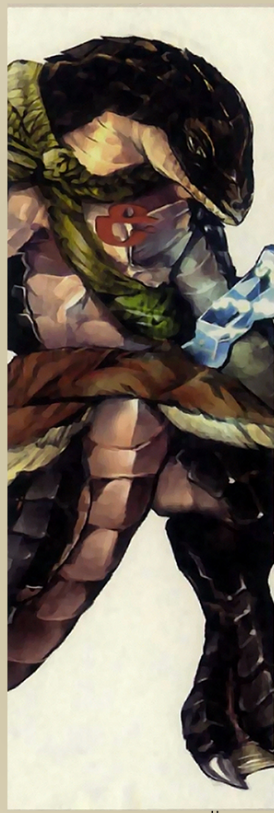
1. ⏎Wulingyuan
2. ⏎ Sound of affirmation.
3. ⏎ Events from Drama CD 1.
4. ⏎ A to U means the Japanese language Hiragana system, which is A, E, I, O, U. Not English!
5. ⏎ Same as 'woof'. Hence 'Wan' in 'Wanko'. I prefer Japanese terms so I'll use them when available.
6. ⏎ Lord of Terror
7. ⏎ Was originally 「Scare」 but I think 「Intimidate」 sounds better.
8. ⏎ Was originally 「Middle Cure Wounds」.
9. ⏎ Victim's language sounds like

gibberish to the ordinary reader.

10. ⏎Chang pao
11. ⏎ Was originally 「Protection Energy Ice」.
12. ⏎ Teacher, also used as an apellation/suffix to address a teacher of some sort.
13. ⏎ Was originally Mass Cure Light Wounds.

Illustrations

Character 13



ザリュース・シャシャ

Demi-Human
Race

Zaryusu Shasha

Strongest Lizardman Warrior

Job	Traveler		
Residence	One of the houses in the Green Claw Tribe		
Alignment	Good~Neutral	Sense of Justice:	100
Racial Level	Lizard Man		1 lv
Job Level	Fighter		10 lv
	Sword Master		6 lv
	Ranger		1 lv
	Sage		2 lv

[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 20 level
Racial level Job level
Total 1 level Total 19 level

status 0 50 100

ABILITY CHART

- HP
- MP
- PHY. ATK
- PHY. DEF
- AGILITY
- MAG. ATK
- MAG. DEF
- RESIST
- SPECIAL

Character 14

クルシュ・
ルールー

Demi-Human
Race

Crusch Lulu

BEAUTY WITH
WHITE SCALES

Job	Red Eye Tribe Acting Chief		
Residence	One of the houses in the Red Eye Tribe		
Alignment	Neutral	Sense of Justice:	50
Racial Level	Awakened Elder Blood Lizard Man		1 lv
Job Level	Druid		8 lv
	Mystic Shaman		5 lv
	Summoner		2 lv
	Dragon Adept		1 lv

[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 17 level

Racial level Job level

Total 1 level Total 16 level

status 0 50 100

ABILITY CHART

- HP
- MP
- PHY. ATK
- PHY. DEF
- AGILITY
- MAG. ATK
- MAG. DEF
- RESIST
- SPECIAL

Character 15

ゼンベル・ググー

Demi-Human
Race

Zenberu Gugu

Strong Arm Brute

Job	Dragon Tusk Tribal Chief		
Residence	Dragon Tusk Tribal Chief Residence		
Alignment	Neutral	Sense of Justice:	50
Racial Level	Lizard Man		5 lv
Job Level	Fighter		1 lv
	Monk		10 lv
	Single Brawler		1 lv
	Ki Master		2 lv

[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 18 level
Racial level Job level
Total 5 level Total 13 level

status 0 50 100

ABILITY CHART

- HP
- MP
- PHY. ATK
- PHY. DEF
- AGILITY
- MAG. ATK
- MAG. DEF
- RESIST
- SPECIAL

Character 16

イグヴァ=41

Heteromorphic Race

Iguvua=41

Experimental sample No. 41

Job	Guinea Pig	
Residence	Nil	
Alignment	Extreme Evil	Sense of Justice: -500
Racial Level	Nil	
	*level 22 when he was just a monster (Starting level before his ability was enhanced with special skills)	
Job Level	Nil	

*RUSTLE
*RUSTLE
Postscript by Sə-bin
LET'S MAKE A
CRUSCH FIGURINE

@akensnest

Credits

Translator: Skythewood

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